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Narendra Modi's Paradoxical Claim on the Legacy of Gandhi

Ramachandra Guha

India has established a committee to commemorate next year's 150th anniversary of the birth of the "father of the nation", Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the members include politicians across party lines as well as some foreign representatives, among them the Nobel laureates Desmond Tutu and Al Gore. Hailing Gandhi as "India's greatest gift to humankind", whose "name finds resonance across the continents", the committee plans a year-long programme of celebration, commencing on his birthday, October 2, and ending on the same day in 2019.

Mr Modi's bid to appropriate Gandhi is paradoxical. The prime minister spent most of his formative years in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a hardline Hindu organisation which reviled Gandhi for allegedly being too soft on Muslims. The antagonism between the RSS and Gandhi was at its most intense in the months after August 15, 1947, when the subcontinent was freed from British rule but also divided into the separate nations of India and Pakistan. Gandhi went on peace

marches and fasts to protect the rights of the millions of Muslims who had stayed in India. He insisted that "India does not belong to Hindus alone". He told his compatriots that even if Pakistan persecuted its Hindu and Sikh minorities, India "would be betraying the Hindu religion if we did evil because others had done it". His "basic creed" remained what it had always been—"that India is the home of Muslims no less than of Hindus".

The RSS, on the other hand, believed that, with the creation of Pakistan, there was no place any more for Muslims in India. Their hatred of Gandhi emanated from the organisation's head, a polemical preacher named M.S. Golwalkar. In December 1947, as Gandhi continued to campaign for inter-faith harmony, Golwalkar made a speech in which he declared that "no power on Earth could keep" Muslims in India. "They would have to quit the country." Golwalkar went on to say of Gandhi: "We have the means whereby such men can be immediately silenced, but it is our tradition not to be inimical to Hindus. If we are compelled, we will

have to resort to that course too.” Six weeks later, Gandhi was murdered by a Hindu fanatic who had once been a member of the RSS. Though this person may have been acting as a freelancer, the speeches made by Golwalkar showed very clearly that the organisation detested Gandhi.

Many RSS members were not sorry to see Gandhi being “immediately silenced”. The RSS was banned after Gandhi’s death. The ban was lifted a year and a half later, and in subsequent decades the organisation grew steadily in strength and influence. Its political arm, the Bharatiya Janata party, came to rule large parts of India. While the RSS muted its criticism of Gandhi, its hatred of Muslims remained intense. In his own writings, Golwalkar characterised Muslims and Christians as enemies

of the nation.

When Mr Modi became prime minister of India in 2014, he had been in public life for close to 40 years. Joining the RSS as a young man, he was weaned on Golwalkar’s ideas (and prejudices) and even wrote an adulatory biography of him. There is no evidence that he ever dissented from the RSS’s views of Gandhi, or of Muslims. However, since becoming PM, Mr Modi has invoked Gandhi’s name often. He dedicated his flagship programme to rid India of open defecation to Gandhi. And he has made it a point to visit Gandhi’s ashram in the company of foreign leaders. He has gone there with Chinese President Xi Jinping, with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan, and, most recently, with the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

This latest celebration of Gandhi is just the most recent attempt by Mr Modi to link his name with a man whom his own mentor cordially disliked. Might it be that he recognises that Gandhi is the most widely admired Indian outside India? And that he wishes to accrue credit for himself by association? That may be so, but it is hard to see this exploitation of Gandhi’s legacy as anything other than rank opportunism. In the four years that Mr Modi has been in power, Muslims have been attacked by Hindu lynch mobs and verbally abused by serving cabinet ministers. India has moved further in the direction of being a Hindu majoritarian state than at any previous time in its history. How can Mr Modi promote Gandhi abroad while at the same time denying what he stood for at home?

A Practical Program to Give a New Lease of Life to Land Reforms

Bharat Dogra

At last some voices are rising to strongly assert the need for better implementation of land reforms. On October 2, Gandhi Jayanti day, nearly 25,000 landless workers and adivasi peasants gathered at Mela Maidan, Gwalior to raise a strong voice in favour of land reforms. This assembly was part of the larger efforts of Ekta Parishad and other Gandhian organisations for a breakthrough in long-neglected land reforms.

While the importance of land reforms for bringing equality and reducing poverty in rural areas is widely recognised, nevertheless, land reforms and in particular land

redistribution have been badly neglected in India in recent times. At some stage, this phase of neglect has to end and a new beginning has to be made for land reforms as this is too important an area to be ignored for long. Here a practical program is proposed to give a new lease of life to land reforms. We propose that first of all, at least those initiatives that had been taken some years ago but could not be taken to a satisfactory conclusion must be fully implemented. After this initial phase, we can then plan for wider land reforms.

First of all, much more can be done to ensure better and more

effective implementation of the Forest Rights Act. As this legislation once held up so much hope for adivasis and other forest-dweller communities, it is important that all the processes related to it be first completed so that these communities are better placed in terms of land and livelihood rights. Because of inadequate and even faulty implementation of this Act, in many places, forest-dwelling communities are perhaps placed even worse placed than recognised tribal communities in terms of their claims having been rejected or ignored.

Another area where earlier

efforts need to be taken to their logical conclusion relates to the distribution of homestead lands. This work should have completed long ago, but still lakhs of people in rural areas lack a proper housing place with legal rights. This makes them vulnerable to exploitation by powerful and big landowners who often claim that the landless are living on their land and hence should provide them free or cheap labor.

Land records must be jointly in the name of husband and wife. Women farmers who work so hard but whose contribution is often ignored should get proper recognition. In the case of single women, while some efforts have been made to help them retain their land rights, more needs to be done for this.

All these efforts can be taken forward together if there is a clear land reforms policy and a national task-force on land reforms can ensure much needed continuity in land reforms. These steps are also needed for ensuring that we do not stop merely with the completion of pending works but have a much broader and well-thought out vision of land reforms ahead of us.

These are also broadly the demands being raised by the ongoing mobilisation of Ekta Parishad and other Gandhian organisations for better implementation of land reforms, which need to be supported at a wider level.

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Babasaheb Ambedkar and Neoliberal Economic Reforms: Part II

Anand Teltumbde

Ambedkar and Globalisation

At the outset, to speak about Ambedkar in relation to globalisation, which represents a paradigmatic transformation of global capitalism into its extremist version, is fundamentally speculative. But there are enough fools who rush in where angels fear to tread. Since they cannot rationally justify their support to globalisation, they have been awkwardly invoking Ambedkar, speculating that if he had lived, he would have supported globalisation. In any case, there being so little knowledge about economic policies, the gullible listeners tend to believe these tricksters, who pretend intellectual prowess and already enjoy some social reputation. It is futile to engage with them at such a speculative level. However, if we understand what globalisation is, we can objectively assess where Ambedkar would stand vis-à-vis globalisation.

Globalisation is an extremist version of resurgent liberalism in retaliation to its century long marginalisation by communist challenge and Keynesianism. It is basically premised on extreme individualism, competition as the prime mover of progress, and free market as its prototype. Pitching every individual in competition with the rest of the world, it follows the social Darwinist justification for inequality, exploitation, and social injustice. While it is thus biased in favour of the rich and powerful in

relation to the poor masses, in its ruthless logic it favours the winner and discards the losers. Therefore, in its proclivities it is absolutely unsustainable. Translated into an economic policy package, it is familiarly known as privatisation, deregulation and liberalisation, without any concern for the weak and poor. This strategy of global capital has been enabled by the late 20th century information and communication technologies and emboldened by the collapse of the erstwhile Soviet regime. It manifests itself in the form of accumulation by dispossession, unmindful of the consequences for the survival of the human race itself. People are being denuded of their meagre possessions all over the world. While the State is actively facilitating this process of accumulation of global capital, it is withdrawing from its role as the provider of social goods such as education, healthcare, etc. to the people.

If this is the character of globalisation, would Ambedkar, whose vision was to see human destiny in the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, support it? Actually, if there is anything that can be conceived as being ideologically opposite to Ambedkar, it is globalisation.

Globalisation and Dalits

Perhaps Dalits, who are fed on an indentarian diet, would not be impressed by the picture of

Part I of this article appeared in the previous issue.

devastation globalisation has created the world over. For instance, there is no dispute that inequalities have risen at an unprecedented rate in every country in almost direct proportion to the degree of free-market policies that country has followed. Loss of jobs, democratic spaces, habitat, environment and social security for vast masses of people are rampantly observed everywhere. But identity obsessed Dalits would not relate with it. They will still argue that they are a different people faced with the unique problem of caste and the heaps of contra-evidence do not mean anything to them. Although it is most unfortunate that Dalits should be so sectarian in their attitude, this argument impels one to focus on the specifics of the problems faced by Dalits.

With the heuristic that the adverse impact of globalisation is felt by people in inverse proportion to their placement in social hierarchy, it would not be difficult to see that Dalits are the most affected people by it. But only saying this much may not appeal to Dalits, they may probably consider it to be too superficial. We will therefore need to consider the impact of globalisation on Dalits within a more comprehensive framework, what I would call a project of their emancipation. This project can be conceived in terms of four empowerments: 1. individual empowerment; 2. Socio-economic empowerment; 3. Socio-political empowerment; and 4. Socio-cultural empowerment. If these four empowerments are accomplished, one can reasonably say that the emancipation of Dalits is achieved. We identify salient proxy variables to map each of these four empowerments: education and health for individual empowerment; land

reforms and jobs for socio-economic empowerment; democratisation for socio-political empowerment; and modernity for socio-cultural empowerment. Let us now assess the impact of globalisation on each of these proxy variables in a systematic and somewhat scientific manner.

The greatest impact on people comes through the withdrawal of the State from its obligation towards people and privatisation of what was public. Education, marked as the greatest enabler, is getting increasingly beyond the reach of Dalits. One sees rampant commercialisation of the sector, with multilayered quality of educational institutions catering to different segments of the education market. It quite corresponds with the caste hierarchies that existed in olden times. Health services were already one of the most privatised sectors in the country; now they have almost disappeared from the public domain.

As regards land reforms, the entire discourse has vanished and is being replaced by corporate land grab in the garb of development. It is leading to significant land loss and increasing landlessness of Dalits in villages. Jobs are fast disappearing. The public sector jobs which were accessible to Dalits have been fast decreasing since 1997, effectively marking the end of reservation there. As regards democracy, it has only remained in the symbolic façade of elections. Outside elections, there is no space for people to express their opinion or dissent. The slightest indication of dissent invites a naxal or Maoist tag, which is being stuck on Dalit youth with impunity to destroy their life.

Modernity, which means transcending decadent traditions and customs, whatever their

source may be, and adopting the scientific outlook. Understanding the impact of globalisation on this proxy variable may not be easy, because of the dominant discourse that associates globalisation with cultural universalisation. That has not been true however. The true processes can be characterised by hybridisation, glocalisation and the likes, which means that globalisation assimilates what is valued by the local elites with the dominant global cultural resources. As such, all the old traditions and customs of Hindus, including castes, which were apologetically spoken about until 1980s, have resurged with a vengeance. The neoliberal generation now speaks about them with pride. If caste atrocities are taken as the indicator of casteism (and I would take it as the best indicator), one will have to infer that casteism is on a definite rise during the period of globalisation.

Tus, we can see that globalisation has comprehensively damaged what can be called the emancipation project of Dalits. There will certainly be a few Dalit individuals who have immensely benefited from it. Globalisation is structurally oriented to benefit stray elements, creating an impression that individuals can achieve anything if they possess the wherewithal to compete. The campaigners of Dalit capitalism, such as the Dalit capitalists or the Dalit Chamber of Commerce, do not have even an elementary understanding of the disastrous impact of globalisation on the Dalits, leave apart the principle that adopting enemy ideology is simply suicidal.

Conclusion

Babasaheb Ambedkar occupies

an important space in Dalit psyche. He represents their ideal, ideology and aspirations. Nothing that is not compatible with him can be considered by Dalits. But this assessment is mediated by the vested interests in various garbs. They have iconised him among the masses in reactionary ways. The masses then tend to assess anything with reference to their false understanding of this icon; if it is not attuned to this icon, it is summarily rejected and vice versa, even in the face of contrary experience of the masses. Globalisation is one such phenomenon. It is being implemented in India for nearly three decades now, and the majority of Dalits have actually suffered its ill effects. But still they do not have an abhorrence for it, simply because they believe that it is something supported by the image of Ambedkar that is in their minds. Dalits need to understand the real Ambedkar, they need to extricate the real radical Ambedkar as their guide and beacon. The radical Ambedkar is surely the socialist Ambedkar, who was in relentless search of truth, of the way which will lead the world to sustainability and humans to their utopia marked by him with the three ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. Even if the Dalits internalise only this, they would have extricated him from the reactionary marsh created by vested interests.

Globalisation is a euphemistic term for the imperialist strategy of global capital. In essence it is capitalism, but is actually an extremist version of it, which disregards its own sustainability in pursuit of unbridled profits. Capitalism had set in place limits for exploitation of surplus value from labour, insofar

as the latter needed to be provided with wherewithal for reproduction and also the purchasing power to buy his finished products. Globalisation, intoxicated with technology, has completely undermined labour and has been out to discard it or dispossess it of whatever little it had. It basically desires extermination of

the majority of people, the rejects of the market, who it believes parasitically consume the planet's resources. There is no intellect required to assess that such a creed or a system would be an anathema to Babasaheb Ambedkar.

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Mahatma Gandhi: The Great Communicator

Nikhil Chakravartty

As a tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on his 150th Birth Anniversary, we reproduce below the Gandhi Peace Foundation Lecture 1995 delivered by Nikhil Chakravartty, the renowned editor of Mainstream Weekly, in New Delhi on January 30, 1995.

I am deeply touched by having been asked to deliver this year's Gandhi Peace Foundation Lecture. Nobody is more conscious than I am about my inadequacy in speaking on this sacred occasion, the day of the martyrdom of the greatest son of my country. Perhaps my only qualification to talk about him is that I belong to the generation that was witness to the historic transition from subjection to freedom of our great motherland, and as a young reporter I cherish the memory of the exciting moments in the presence of Gandhi.

I am no scholar of the study of Gandhiji's great life, rather I spent my activist youth as an impudent critic of the elders in our national movement for independence. Having spent over half-a-century as a journalist, I have chosen as the subject of this presentation: 'Mahatma Gandhi—the Great Communicator'. This is a very subjective endeavour—a string

of cursory thoughts—based largely on my personal reflections on our struggle for freedom and how it acquired its unique characteristic from the way Gandhiji built and guided it.

Our freedom struggle needs to be assessed in a historical perspective. Its dominant characteristic that marks it out from other great revolutions in history was its tremendous sweep. No other revolution in history set in motion so many millions of people. This is no idle boast but the plain statement of a historical reality which is often missed by our academics and politicians alike.

In late eighteenth century France, the objective conditions of mass discontent and disenchantment with the ancient regime no doubt prevailed, but the actual revolutionary action involved a small number of a few thousand, mostly in Paris; once the fuse was lighted, the revolution flared up in different parts of France without any coherent leadership. It was largely a spontaneous upsurge, even the leadership at the core could not hold its own and it changed hands fast so that even those who led it at the beginning were soon either left by the wayside or liquidated,

giving rise to the classic phrase that the revolution had devoured its own children.

The Russian Revolution had a more organised leadership than those who had led the French Revolution, but it was a small band of determined militant revolutionaries under a leader who had an uncanny sense of the configuration of forces ranged in a decadent imperial system. So, when the Czarist system itself cracked up with the fiasco of defeat in the First World War, Lenin gave the call for capture of power which the Bolsheviks swiftly carried out. In terms of moving millions into revolutionary action, the Bolshevik Revolution was mostly the handiwork of small groups of determined revolutionaries who, everywhere, first captured the key points of power and then sought to redesign the social structure in the interest of the common people as they thought fit. In a sense it was a sort of managerial revolution led by a party which concentrated on the means of capturing power, and power alone.

The Chinese Revolution was also similar to the Russian Revolution in its broad historical sweep. In this case also, it was a small group of a few thousand led by a remarkable leader, Mao Zedong, and steered in the Long March which was a sort of armed padayatra—a decade-old campaign to rouse the peasantry in some pockets of the vast sprawling domain of China, where the administrative system had broken down and had been replaced by an ineffective regime under the Kuomintang. It was a very effective use of the guerrilla war approach which enabled Mao to spread his network under conditions wherein the Japanese had occupied most of the mainland. Unlike the Russian

Revolution, which relied more on the working class, the Chinese Revolution targeted mainly the peasantry. Here too, the number of people actively engaged in mass action was small—the same reliance on a determined band. The form of action was essentially armed guerrilla forays which harassed the enemy and finally overpowered it. In this way, the authority of the State was subverted until the citadel of power was finally captured by the guerrilla bands of yesterday that had come together to form the victorious People's Liberation Army.

Compare these three great landmarks in modern history with what happened in our country in the first half of the twentieth century. Stage by stage, the premier nationalist organisation, committed to the struggle for independence, gradually brought in larger and larger sections of the people into the vortex of struggle for power. The only weapon for winning power was to organise larger and larger sections of India's unarmed humanity and involve them in mass action. By the time independence actually came, the Congress commanded much larger sections of the people than any organisation had so far done in history.

The main feature of the Indian struggle for freedom has been that it depended almost wholly on activating the masses by injecting into them the urge for independence by emphasising the strength of the Indian people vis-a-vis the colonial rulers, and thereby set them free from the fear of the ruler. The concept of non-violence, as it was practised, emphasised on the strength of the Indian people in relation to the ruler who had to depend on the gun for establishing his authority. In this sway, the Arms Act, through which

the Indian people were denied the right to defend themselves, was turned into a symbol of strength, with the people depending on their conscious non-violent strength to ward off the foreign ruler. This meant constant effort on the part of the leaders of the independence movement to raise the consciousness of the vast masses of common people—not just a small section of determined revolutionaries as had been the case with the other great revolutions.

This aspect of the Indian Revolution marks it out as distinct from the other revolutions in modern times. Nowhere was the question of the gun permitted to be of supreme or decisive importance in the mainstream of our national struggle for independence. This does not mean that the sacrifice of those revolutionaries who unwaveringly gave their lives by taking up arms against the foreign ruler was of no consequence. From Aurobindo Ghosh and Savarkar to Bhagat Singh and Chandrashekhar Azad to Subhas Chandra Bose, all of them made the finest contributions to the struggle for freedom. But the successive waves of mass upheavals that decisively brought down the British rule in India did not depend on the wielding of arms by a small minority of dedicated revolutionaries, but essentially on the raising of the level of consciousness of the broad masses of the people.

This was precisely the unique contribution of Gandhiji. When historians and publicists talk of Gandhi having taken politics from being the monopoly of the intelligentsia to the wider world of the common humanity, it was not just a question of broadening the base of the movement for freedom. This was not merely a question of

quantitative increase in the number of participants in the movement. It was the emergence of a qualitatively different type of movement, with its essentially distinct hallmark.

How was this achieved, what was the weapon by which the mass consciousness was raised? How was the message of the freedom struggle conveyed to the common people? Herein comes Gandhi's role as a great communicator. For, he depended solely on communicating the message of freedom to the masses and thereby sought to lift their consciousness. That message was not just a mere exhortation for rousing the emotional urge of a nation to be free—however important might have been that task for welding the sense of unity among the people. This had been done in a limited area during the Bengal anti-partition movement of 1905—which had assumed the character of a mass movement in a particular region and had been successful in forcing the British rulers to abandon their plan to vivisect one of the militant pockets of the national movement.

Gandhiji's movement, on the other hand, was much more comprehensive: it tried to activate all the diverse sectors of the national spectrum. From the affluent classes to the impoverished, from the intelligentsia to the unlettered—nobody was left out. It was not confined to only the people at the grassroots, as is being done nowadays a multitude of activist groups. No doubt these efforts are bringing some relief to the people at the bottom. By their endeavour these activist groups have certainly been educating and activating the uncared-for sections of society to stand on their own legs. What distinguished Gandhi's movement for independence was that it was not

only much more comprehensive, it also sought to open the eyes of the millions left in darkness about the limited capacity of the foreign ruler and make them aware about the great possibility for the country's advancement once the foreign ruler was forced to quit through the demonstration of strength by the people.

Gandhiji ran the pilot project of his new technique in South Africa against the hated rule of apartheid. There too he did not advocate the taking up of arms, but sought to instil in the common people a realisation of their own strength in blocking and muzzling the White ruler's oppressive rule. From that apprenticeship abroad, when he came back to India in 1915, he found a country where political activity was afflicted with stagnation and political forces, mostly confined to the intelligentsia, were in disarray. The tour he undertook—*Bharat Darshan*—enabled him to understand the urges of the common people. Following that, one of his first acts was the Champaran satyagraha, a form of struggle about which both the Indian politicians and the British rulers were completely unfamiliar. Drawing upon his South African experience, he made a special effort at cultivating the minority Muslim community, which led to his interest and subsequent compact with the Khilafat agitation. The Rowlatt satyagraha and the Khilafat movement were his subsequent excursions before he launched his first major national campaign in the form of the non-cooperation movement of 1920. For the first time in the annals of the national movement, a countrywide campaign involving the common masses was initiated.

It is not the purpose of this

presentation to trace the history of the freedom struggle—what is relevant for the purpose is Gandhiji's role as a communicator. He left out no means, no technique, to rouse the consciousness of the people—instil in them the imperative of their active participation in the movement. For this, he took up a wide range of activities pertaining to all sections of the people—from education to village welfare, from the spinning wheel to cattle protection. His effort at total identification with the village poor made him design even his personal attire and way of living. Since he looked upon public activity as having an element of moral purpose, he regarded the entire crusade for independence as an experiment with truth. For him the freedom of the country was part of the struggle for truth—an approach which perhaps the unlettered villager, steeped in the tradition of customs, found easy to grasp.

This is an aspect of Gandhiji's movement which was not easy for the Western educated liberal intelligentsia of the city to understand. It is in this context that there took place the intense debate over the question of linking ends with means. From the Marxists to the radicalists of all hues, the linking of ends and means could not possibly be a part of the domain of politics, where the supremacy of the objective of power was of paramount consideration, and hence there could be no organised link between ends and means. In the early 1930s, when Aldous Huxley reopened the question in his book, *Ends and Means*, the Indian Marxist response was 'Ends are Means'. This is where Gandhiji's insistence on politics and morality being inseparable demarcated him from the Western

educated liberals and helped him to a large measure to be attuned to the philosophical base of very large sections of the corpus of India's socio-cultural heritage. This also denoted that for him politics—the struggle for independence—could not be separated from the totality of human conditions. In his scheme of things, the struggle for independence was but a part of the wider struggle for the regeneration of the entire society.

As a communicator, Gandhiji, like most of our great leaders, used the medium of the press apart from the spoken word. In the midst of all his multitude of activities, *Indian Opinion*, *Young India* and *Harijan* came out regularly—a one-man endeavour—conveying his message to his countrymen. The importance that was attached to the written word by Gandhiji and other national leaders reflected their urge to spread their message to as wide a section of the people as possible. The means to convey that message were often primitive, but no medium available at that time was left out. From handwritten posters and graffiti to traditional interpersonal means, such as the travelling bards—the bauls of Bengal, for instance—to the educated student going out on literacy-cum-swadeshi missions and the composing of patriotic songs and setting up of choirs in villages, mohallas and bustis to the immortal 'magic lantern'—there was no video then—nothing was left out. It was a gigantic operation, sustained through the ups and downs of the freedom struggle.

How true to his convictions Gandhiji was in his actual functioning as a journalist can be gathered from many of his writings. Here is a passage from *Young India* (July 2, 1925) about how he strove to serve

as a true communicator:

To be true to my faith, therefore, I may not write in anger or malice. I may not write idly. I may not write merely to excite passion. The reader can have no idea of the restraint I have to exercise from week to week in the choice of topics and my vocabulary. It is training for me. It enables me to peep into myself and to make discoveries of my weaknesses. Often my vanity dictates a smart expression or my anger a harsh adjective. It is a terrible ordeal but a fine exercise to remove these weeds.

As a communicator, Gandhiji was aware of the need to take into account the level of awareness of his target reader or listener. This can be seen in the very naming of each of the great upsurges. None of these were just spontaneous upsurges, but each one was preceded by meticulous preparations. By the correct standards of a communicator, Gandhiji chose the form of struggle, the target and even the language of every campaign in keeping with the level of consciousness of the common people. In the first round it was Non-Cooperation (1920). Ten years later, it was more assertive—Civil Disobedience (1930–32). And a decade later, having taken into account both the internal and the external circumstances, it was Quit India (1942). With every stage, the tempo was raised higher, mass involvement was more intense and widespread than before, until the finale was reached with the battle cry of Do-or-Die. Here was the remarkable manifestation of the acute sensitivity of a great communicator.

It may be worthwhile to refer briefly to a couple of specific instances of how Gandhiji operated as a communicator. Before he undertook the Dandi March for

the Salt Satyagraha in 1930, there was careful consultation within the leadership; it was not just the product of the brainwave of one individual leader. Recent research on the subject by a very perceptive scholar in social communication at Ahmedabad has brought out significant details about it. ('What Moves the Masses? Salt Satyagraha as Case-Study' by Suchitra, *Mainstream*, January 28, 1995.) After the pledge to achieve complete independence, taken on the banks of the Ravi at Lahore on December 31, 1929, first came the Independence Day declaration of January 26, 1930 which catalogued the injustices of the British Raj. Next came Gandhiji's letter to Viceroy Lord Irwin, in which eleven demands were raised, including the abolition of the salt tax. Meanwhile, the leaders discussed the form of civil disobedience to be launched. Pandit Nehru and Subhas Bose suggested the setting up of a parallel government while Sardar Patel proposed a march to Delhi or alternatively a countrywide breaking of land laws. Gandhiji envisaged a long drawn-out movement in which the masses would have to be drawn in. He felt the British Government would pounce upon the setting up of a parallel government or a march to Delhi. Gandhiji felt his target audience was the Indian society that needed to be unified and he was conscious of the need to cultivate public opinion abroad. So, the defiance of the salt law was taken up as the initial item of civil disobedience. Resentment at the salt law had a long history. As early as 1844, there were disturbances protesting against this impost which touched even the poorest of the poor. The Congress, at its inaugural session in 1885, had referred to it. During the 1905 swadeshi movement

in Bengal, the call was given for the boycott of Manchester cloth and salt imported from Liverpool. At the same time, focusing on this iniquitous tax, Gandhiji expected to mobilise international support, at least to expose the exploitation of the Indian people under the British Raj. In his own hand he wrote out for the press: "I want world sympathy in this battle of Right against Might."

Then came the form of the struggle. A march from Ahmedabad to the seashore at Dandi passing through villages would provide sufficient space for non-stop propaganda for weeks against the Raj and mobilise villagers along the route, and its publicisation would bestir other volunteers in other parts of the country and thereby propagate the vision of Purna Swaraj. The march was undertaken by 80 persons including Gandhiji himself. The other 79 were chosen to represent all the provinces in India, and they were drawn from all communities—Muslims, Christians and Hindus, both upper caste and the depressed. Abbas Tyabji and Sarojini Naidu were chosen as leaders in the event of his own arrest—symbolically representing the Muslims and the womanhood of the country. And he sent his letter to the Viceroy notifying his decision to break the salt law, through an Englishman, Reginald Reynolds, who later recalled:

I realise that Gandhi's use of me was symbolic—it was to show that this was not a matter of Indians versus British but of principles.

The whole nation was electrified by this new form of mass action—totally peaceful and non-violent, even in the face of police brutality when the satyagrahis tried to enter the salt factory at Dharasana.

In this campaign—the first truly nationwide mass campaign

against the Raj—Gandhi often used religious idioms as the best means of arousing the rural masses familiar with religious lore. Incidentally, Gandhiji drew the correct lesson from the poor response to the repeat performance of the Dandi March exactly two years later, in 1932—after the failure of the Gandhi–Irwin pact. From this the lesson was drawn that the repetition of a specific form of campaign does not fetch the same results. This is a lesson which many of our political parties and mass organisation activists need to keep in mind today.

Ten years after the Civil Disobedience movement, I had a personal experience of Gandhiji's remarkable style of communication at the Ramgarh Congress session in 1940. The Congress nagar had come up in a rural setting with bamboo and local shrubs. During his early morning walk, Gandhiji noticed a red flag fluttering at a corner of the enclosure reserved for the leaders' camp. It appeared that the fraternal delegation from Burma's Dobama party was put up there and they had hoisted their party flag. Panditji was sent for and he tried to explain to Gandhiji that this red flag, being the party flag of the Burmese delegation, should not be taken as a defiant rival to the Congress tricolour. But Gandhiji was adamant, and so Panditji quietly managed to shift the Burmese delegation to the nearby Dak Bungalow outside the Congress nagar. Some of us thought that the matter betrayed an attitude of intolerance on the part of Gandhiji.

In the afternoon of the same day, the Subjects Committee was scheduled to meet. In those days, the Congress was a unique national platform, including within its fold different ideological and political formations, from the Congress

Socialist Party and the banned Communist Party (that was then functioning as National Front group after the name of its legal journal) to the so-called Nationalist Congressmen representing by and large the point of view of Hindu orthodoxy. There were arrest warrants against the Communist leaders, including the notification of a handsome police reward for their capture. The Communists had sent one of their leaders, Bharadwaj, to participate in the Congress session. With an arrest warrant against him and the police and their informers hovering all over the place, it was difficult for him to come out of his undisclosed shelter in the Congress nagar and place the National Front point of view before the Subjects Committee. The Communists approached Panditji for advice on how Bharadwaj could come to the Subjects Committee session. Panditji promptly went to Gandhiji for advice. Remembering the morning incident, we were almost sure that Gandhiji would be far from helpful. A few minutes later, Panditji came out of Gandhiji's camp and told us that Bharadwaj would go to the Subjects Committee pandal with Gandhiji himself in his car. We were literally taken aback when we found the car carrying Gandhiji going right up to the back of the platform, and out came Bharadwaj trailing behind Gandhiji, and then sitting on the dais and greeting the leaders from Maulana Azad, Rajen Babu, Sardar Patel and Panditji to JP and all the others. Sardar Patel moved the official resolution, followed by JP who placed the CSP point of view. Then Bharadwaj placed the National Front point of view. Discussions went on, and in the end, replying to the debate, Sardar Patel tore the CSP and the National Front

amendments to pieces and carried the day. Meanwhile, unnoticed by many, Bharadwaj slipped out, helped by Panditji and Dr Lohia.

This indeed was an amazing experience. How could one reconcile Gandhiji's morning allergy to the red flag and the very same afternoon sheltering a 'wanted' Communist leader and allowing him to come before the party forum and place his point of view? I have thought over this incident many times since. By his conduct, Gandhiji was transmitting two messages. First, by insisting on the removal of the red flag, Gandhiji wanted to convey the message to all, that within the national platform which the Congress represented in the struggle against the foreign power, there could be but one leadership and one flag—no question of any ambiguity. At the same time, he wanted to convey the clear message to the British Raj that in its confrontation with the Congress, no party would be on its side, that all were behind the Congress. Subsequently, it was the breach of this commitment in 1942, when the Communists went against the Quit India upheaval, that led to their being thrown out of the Congress.

The protracted negotiations over the transfer of power and the Muslim League's insistence on Pakistan finally led to the Mountbatten Award of June 3, 1947, by which the country was partitioned. As was well known at that time, Gandhiji was opposed to partition. The difference between him and the leaders of the Congress flowed from of his premonition about the future. As a great communicator, Gandhiji could not only transmit but perceive as well about what was in store. This is borne out by a very penetrating passage in Tendulkar's biography,

Mahatma. Two days before the Mountbatten Award, that is, on June 1, 1947, Gandhiji had woken up in the morning earlier than usual and spent the time before the prayer musing:

Today I find myself all alone. Even the Sardar and Jawaharlal think that my reading of the political situation is wrong and peace is sure to return if partition is agreed upon. They did not like my telling the Viceroy that even if there was to be partition, it should not be through British intervention or under the British rule. They wonder, if I have not deteriorated with age. Nevertheless, I must speak as I feel, if I am to prove a true, loyal friend to the Congress and to the British people, as I claim to be, regardless of whether my advice is appreciated or not. I see clearly that we are setting about this business the wrong way. 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.

Then after a pause, he pondered:

I shall, perhaps, not be alive to witness it, but should the evil I apprehend overtake India and her independence be imperiled, let posterity know what agony this old soul went through thinking of it. Let it not be said that Gandhi was party to India's vivisection. But everybody is today impatient for independence. Therefore, there is no other help.

Here was a seer who could communicate his premonition. For those of us who were fortunate in watching him in person, those last days of his life—with his mind heavy with the unleashing of Hindu-Muslim clashes even after the foreign power had left—were perhaps the most momentous. On the one hand, there was the realisation

of his goal—the independence of the country—while at the same time, the menace of communal hatred was vitiating that newly-won freedom. The hour of fulfilment was tinged with a horrendous tragedy. For him therefore, the achievement of independence did not allow a moment of rest: the struggle had to go on. Since he could not avert the partitioning of the country, he had to meet the challenge of its sombre aftermath—how to put out the hell-fire of communal animosity. And so he set out on this, his final crusade—how to transform the millions of common humanity that he had served to mould all his life and make each one of them his brother's keeper. In the midst of blood and fire, he strove—Noakhali, Beliaghata, Bihar and Delhi—until he fell a martyr to the cause which is yet to be redeemed by his heirs and successors. Till the last drop of life ebbed out of that frail body, the great communicator never ceased for a moment to transmit his message—the message which remains a sacred injunction even to this day forty-seven years later.

Today, this country needs a Gandhi to bring about the regeneration of our democracy. With morality being banished from politics and public life getting corroded all around, this country today needs the Mahatma, the Great Communicator, more than at any time in the past. Seventy years ago, Mahatma Gandhi had said:

Real swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few, but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused.

This commandment alone can enthrone social justice in this great land of ours.

What Mahatma Gandhi Said to Those Who Wanted Beef Banned in India

An excerpt from Gandhi's prayer discourse of July 25, 1947, from the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Volume 88, as published online by the Gandhi Heritage Portal. Translated from Hindi.

Rajendra Babu tells me that he has received some 50,000 postcards, between 25,000 and 30,000 letters and many thousands of telegrams demanding a ban on cow-slaughter. I spoke to you about this before. Why this flood of telegrams and letters? They have had no effect. I have another telegram which says that a friend has started a fast for this cause.

In India no law can be made to ban cow-slaughter.

I do not doubt that Hindus are forbidden the slaughter of cows. I have been long pledged to serve the cow but how can my religion also be the religion of the rest of the Indians? It will mean coercion against those Indians who are not Hindus. We have been shouting from the house-tops that there will be no coercion in the matter of religion. We have been reciting verses from the Koran at the prayer. But if anyone were to force me to recite these verses I would not like it.

How can I force anyone not to slaughter cows unless he is himself so disposed? It is not as if there were only Hindus in the Indian Union. There are Muslims, Parsis, Christians and other religious groups here. The assumption of the Hindus that India now has become the land of the Hindus is erroneous. India belongs to all who live here.

If we stop cow slaughter by law here and the very reverse happens

in Pakistan, what will be the result? Supposing they say Hindus would not be allowed to visit temples because it was against Shariat to worship idols? I see God even in a stone but how do I harm others by this belief? If therefore I am stopped from visiting temples I would still visit them. I shall therefore suggest that these telegrams and letters should cease. It is not proper to waste money on them.

Besides some prosperous Hindus themselves encourage cow-slaughter. True, they do not do it with their own hands. But who sends all the cows to Australia and other countries where they are slaughtered and whence shoes manufactured from cow hide are sent back to India? I know an orthodox Vaishnava Hindu. He used to feed his children on beef soup. On my asking him why he did that he said there was no sin in consuming beef as medicine.

We really do not stop to think what true religion is and merely go about shouting that cow-slaughter should be banned by law. In villages Hindus make bullocks carry huge burdens which almost crush the animals. Is it not cow-slaughter, albeit slowly carried out? I shall therefore suggest that the matter should not be pressed in the Constituent Assembly. . . .

I have been asked, "Since in view of the atrocities being perpetuated by Muslims it is difficult to decide which of the Muslims are to be trusted, what should be our attitude towards the Muslims in the Indian Union? What should the non-Muslims in Pakistan do?"

I have already answered this question. I again repeat that all the religions of India today are being put to the test. It has to be seen how the various religious groups such as the Sikhs, the Hindus, the Muslims and the Christians conduct themselves and how they carry on the affairs of India. Pakistan may be said to belong to Muslims but the Indian Union belongs to all.

If you shake off cowardice and become brave you will not have to consider how you are to behave towards the Muslims. But today there is cowardice in us. For this I have already accepted the blame. I am still wondering how my 30 years' teaching has been so ineffective. Why did I assume, to begin with, that non-violence could be a weapon of cowards? Even now if we can really become brave and love the Muslims, the Muslims will have to stop and think what they could gain by practising treachery against us. They will return love for love. Can we keep the crores of Muslims in the Indian Union as slaves? He who makes slaves of others himself becomes a slave. If we answer sword with sword, the lathi with lathi and kick with kick, we cannot expect that things will be different in Pakistan. We shall then lose our freedom as easily as we have gained it.

Spectre of Fascism

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Bhagat Singh and Savarkar: Two Petitions that Tell Us the Difference Between Hind and Hindutva

On March 23, 1931, Shaheed Bhagat Singh and his two comrades-in-arms, Shaheed Rajguru and Shaheed Sukhdev were hanged in Lahore by the British colonial government. At the time of his martyrdom, Bhagat Singh was barely 23 years old. Despite the fact that he had his whole life ahead of him, he refused to seek clemency from the British as some well-wishers and family members wanted him to do. In his last petition and testament, he demanded that the British be true to the charge they laid against him of waging war against the colonial state and that he be executed by firing squad and not by hanging. The document also lays out his vision for an India whose working people are free from exploitation by either British or Indian “parasites”.

At a time when the Bharatiya Janata Party national executive has decided to make nationalism its rallying cry, and Savarkar its national hero, it is useful to compare the patriotic attitude and vision of Bhagat Singh with the petitions by the Sangh parivar’s icon, V.D. Savarkar, seeking early release. The burden of his petitions: let me go and I will give up the fight for independence and be loyal to the colonial government.

Reproduced below are Shaheed Bhagat Singh’s last petition and the petition V.D. Savarkar filed in 1913.

Shaheed Bhagat Singh’s Last Petition, Lahore Jail, 1931

To: The Punjab Governor

Sir, With due respect we beg

to bring to your kind notice the following: That we were sentenced to death on 7th October 1930 by a British Court, L.C.C Tribunal, constituted under the Sp. Lahore Conspiracy Case Ordinance, promulgated by the H.E. The Viceroy, the Head of the British Government of India, and that the main charge against us was that of having waged war against H.M. King George, the King of England.

The above-mentioned finding of the Court pre-supposed two things:

Firstly, that there exists a state of war between the British Nation and the Indian Nation and, secondly, that we had actually participated in that war and were therefore war prisoners.

The second pre-supposition seems to be a little bit flattering, but nevertheless it is too tempting to resist the desire of acquiescing in it.

As regards the first, we are constrained to go into some detail. Apparently there seems to be no such war as the phrase indicates.

Nevertheless, please allow us to accept the validity of the pre-supposition taking it at its face value. But in order to be correctly understood we must explain it further.

Let us declare that the state of war does exist and shall exist so long as the Indian toiling masses and the natural resources are being exploited by a handful of parasites.

They may be purely British capitalist or mixed British and Indian or even purely Indian. They may be carrying on their insidious exploitation through mixed or even on purely Indian bureaucratic

apparatus. All these things make no difference.

No matter, if your government tries and succeeds in winning over the leaders of the upper strata of the Indian society through petty concessions and compromises and thereby cause a temporary demoralisation in the main body of the forces.

No matter, if once again the vanguard of the Indian movement, the Revolutionary Party, finds itself deserted in the thick of the war.

No matter if the leaders to whom personally we are much indebted for the sympathy and feelings they expressed for us, but nevertheless we cannot overlook the fact that they did become so callous as to ignore and not to make a mention in the peace negotiation of even the homeless, friendless and penniless of female workers who are alleged to be belonging to the vanguard and whom the leaders consider to be enemies of their utopian non-violent cult which has already become a thing of the past; the heroines who had ungrudgingly sacrificed or offered for sacrifice their husbands, brothers, and all that were nearest and dearest to them, including themselves, whom your government has declared to be outlaws.

No matter, if your agents stoop so low as to fabricate baseless calumnies against their spotless characters to damage their and their party’s reputation.

The war shall continue.

It may assume different shapes at different times. It may become now open, now hidden, now purely agitational, now fierce life and death

struggle.

The choice of the course, whether bloody or comparatively peaceful, which it should adopt rests with you. Choose whichever you like. But that war shall be incessantly waged without taking into consideration the petty (illegible) and the meaningless ethical ideologies.

It shall be waged ever with new vigour, greater audacity and unflinching determination till the Socialist Republic is established and the present social order is completely replaced by a new social order, based on social prosperity and thus every sort of exploitation is put an end to and the humanity is ushered into the era of genuine and permanent peace.

In the very near future the final battle shall be fought and final settlement arrived at.

The days of capitalist and imperialist exploitation are numbered. The war neither began with us nor is it going to end with our lives. It is the inevitable consequence of the historic events and the existing environments.

Our humble sacrifices shall be only a link in the chain that has very accurately been beautified by the unparalleled sacrifice of [Jatin] Das and most tragic but noblest sacrifice of Comrade Bhagawati Charan and the glorious death of our dear warrior [Chandrashekhar] Azad.

As to the question of our fates, please allow us to say that when you have decided to put us to death, you will certainly do it.

You have got the power in your hands and the power is the greatest justification in this world.

We know that the maxim "Might is right" serves as your guiding motto. The whole of our trial was just a proof of that.

We wanted to point out that according to the verdict of your court we had waged war and were

therefore war prisoners. And we claim to be treated as such, i.e., we claim to be shot dead instead of to be hanged.

It rests with you to prove that you really meant what your court has said.

We request and hope that you will very kindly order the military department to send its detachment to perform our execution.

Yours,
Bhagat Singh

**V.D. Savarkar's Petition,
Cellular Jail, Andamans, 1913**

To: The Home Member of the Government of India

I beg to submit the following points for your kind consideration:

(1) When I came here in 1911 June, I was along with the rest of the convicts of my party taken to the office of the Chief Commissioner. There I was classed as "D" meaning dangerous prisoner; the rest of the convicts were not classed as "D". Then I had to pass full 6 months in solitary confinement. The other convicts had not. During that time I was put on the coir pounding though my hands were bleeding. Then I was put on the oil-mill—the hardest labour in the jail. Although my conduct during all the time was exceptionally good still at the end of these six months I was not sent out of the jail; though the other convicts who came with me were. From that time to this day I have tried to keep my behaviour as good as possible.

(2) When I petitioned for promotion I was told I was a special class prisoner and so could not be promoted. When any of us asked for better food or any special treatment we were told "You are only ordinary convicts and must eat what the rest do". Thus Sir, Your Honour would see that only for special

disadvantages we are classed as special prisoners.

(3) When the majority of the casemen were sent outside I requested for my release. But, although I had been cased (caned?) hardly twice or thrice and some of those who were released, for a dozen and more times, still I was not released with them because I was their casemen. But when after all, the order for my release was given and when just then some of the political prisoners outside were brought into the troubles I was locked in with them because I was their casemen.

(4) If I was in Indian jails I would have by this time earned much remission, could have sent more letters home, got visits. If I was a transportee pure and simple I would have by this time been released, from this jail and would have been looking forward for ticket-leave, etc. But as it is, I have neither the advantages of the Indian jail nor of this convict colony regulation; though had to undergo the disadvantages of both.

(5) Therefore will your honour be pleased to put an end to this anomalous situation in which I have been placed, by either sending me to Indian jails or by treating me as a transportee just like any other prisoner. I am not asking for any preferential treatment, though I believe as a political prisoner even that could have been expected in any civilized administration in the Independent nations of the world; but only for the concessions and favour that are shown even to the most depraved of convicts and habitual criminals? This present plan of shutting me up in this jail permanently makes me quite hopeless of any possibility of sustaining life and hope. For those who are term convicts the thing is different, but Sir, I have 50 years staring me in the face! How can I pull

up moral energy enough to pass them in close confinement when even those concessions which the vilest of convicts can claim to smoothen their life are denied to me? Either please to send me to Indian jail for there I would earn (a) remission; (b) would have a visit from my people come every four months for those who had unfortunately been in jail know what a blessing it is to have a sight of one's nearest and dearest every now and then! (c) and above all a moral—though not a legal—right of being entitled to release in 14 years; (d) also more letters and other little advantages. Or if I cannot be sent to India I should be released and sent outside with a hope, like any other convicts, to visits after 5 years, getting my ticket leave and calling over my family here. If this is granted then only one grievance remains and that is that I should be held responsible only for my own faults and not of others. It is a pity that I have to ask for this—it is such a fundamental right of every human being! For as there are on the one hand, some 20 political prisoners—young, active and restless, and on the other the regulations of a convict colony, by the very nature of them reducing the liberties of thought and expression to lowest minimum possible; it is but inevitable that every now and then some one of them will be found to have contravened a regulation or two and if all be held responsible for that, as now it is actually done—very little chance of being left outside remains for me.

In the end may I remind your honour to be so good as to go through the petition for clemency, that I had sent in 1911, and to sanction it for being forwarded to the Indian Government?

The latest development of the Indian politics and the conciliating

policy of the government have thrown open the constitutional line once more.

Now no man having the good of India and Humanity at heart will blindly step on the thorny paths which in the excited and hopeless situation of India in 1906–1907 beguiled us from the path of peace and progress.

Therefore 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 which is the foremost condition of that progress.

As long as we are in jails there cannot be real happiness and joy in hundreds and thousands of homes of His Majesty's loyal subjects in India, for blood is thicker than water; but if we be released the people will instinctively raise a shout of joy and

gratitude to the government, who knows how to forgive and correct, more than how to chastise and avenge.

Moreover 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. By keeping me in jail nothing can be got in comparison to what would be otherwise.

The Mighty alone can afford to be merciful and therefore where else can the prodigal son return but to the parental doors of the Government?

Hoping your Honour will kindly take into notion these points.

V.D. Savarkar

Courtesy: The Wire

RSS Supremo's Public Relations Exercise

Ram Puniyani

Do organisations say what they intend to do? Not necessarily. This came out clearly from the three long lectures by RSS Sarsanghchalak Mohan Bhagwat. The event was supposed to be a dialogue, but the maximum dialogue one could see was his answering a few questions at the end of the lectures. That he answered a few questions was strongly underlined, as probably this must have been a novel thing for this organisation.

What did Bhagwat say which was new? He did say that Hindutva includes Muslims, RSS respects the Constitution, RSS is not opposed to reservations, RSS is not dictatorial and that there is place for opinions of others apart from that of Shri Bhagwat, RSS respects the diversity of this Hindu nation, etc. It became

clear the gentleman was replying to the criticism of his organisation by its critics, and there are plenty of them. What appeared novel was the change in the language of the RSS, from that of its major ideologue Guru Golwalkar to Mr. Bhagwat, the current chief. While Golwalkar had bluntly appreciated the Nazi methods of exterminating the minorities, Bhagwat appeared to be accepting the existence of religious minorities. While the Guru had declared that Muslims, Christians and Communists were an internal threat to the Hindu nation, Bhagwat went on to say that today they don't fully agree with Guruji, and so his book, *Bunch of Thoughts*, has been republished with sentences that threaten minorities and assert

Hindu nationalism in a blunt way omitted.

So has the RSS changed? As should be the case with most organisations, the RSS should also be judged by its actions, or by the outcome of activities and programs of the organisations which come into being due to RSS ideology. That is what will tell us the true character, the real agenda of the RSS, and will help us assess why a pleasant face is being presented now?

The core activity of the RSS is structured around shakhas (branches). In these shakhas, young boys are given physical training, one component of which is wielding lathis (batons). This is what is the most visible part of its activities. Running parallel to this is ideological training, that takes place in the bauddhik (intellectual) sessions. This is where the real agenda of the RSS manifests itself. It is from these shakha bauddhiks, which are backed by long training camps leading to a three-year training program, that the Swamyamsevaks / Pracharaks emerge, who are ready to take on the mantle of RSS programs in an independent way.

These bauddhiks indoctrinate the young boys into believing that India has been a Hindu nation from times immemorial. Roughly speaking, the RSS training module, as gleaned from various sources, follows the following lines: 'We' in ancient times had a great society, all castes were equal, women had a honorable place in the society; the society was attacked by foreigners, the Muslims, leading to inequality among castes and degeneration of the status of women; the Muslim kings destroyed our temples and imposed Islam by force; the Muslim kings were very cruel, prominent examples being Mohammad Ghazni (who destroyed the Somnath

temple) and Mohammad Ghori (who betrayed Prithivraj Chouhan); Hindu kings like Maharana Pratap and Shivaji saved the Hindu society; during the freedom movement, while Savarkar put forward the concept of Hindu nationalism, the likes of Gandhi–Nehru and their followers regarded people of foreign religions also as belonging to this land; Gandhi appeased the Muslims due to which Muslims got emboldened and demanded Pakistan; it is due to the faulty policies of Nehru that Kashmir, an integral part of India, has become a problem; and so on and so forth.

After this training, the pracharaks / swayamsevaks start work with different segments of society, or go into organisations directly floated by the RSS, such as the Bhartiya Jansangh, ABVP, BJP, VHP, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram and Seva Bharati, to name a few. Technically, these are all independent organisations, but they are run and controlled by the trained pracharaks of the RSS. So the RSS does not have to act as a remote control, as its ideology runs in the DNA of these organisations. The RSS module of indoctrination has created hatred in society, it has spread hatred against Muslims and partly against Christians as well as against those upholding secular values. One manifestation of this hatred was the murder of Gandhi by Godse, who was a trained pracharak of the RSS. Sardar Patel must have been the first one to articulate this and see beyond the murder of Gandhi. He could see that the core reason behind Gandhi's murder was spread of hatred in society by the RSS.

While it is true that the volunteers of the RSS also do relief work, we must not forget that these same volunteers have been so much indoctrinated with hate against

minorities that they also take up arms to indulge in violence. The violence prevalent in our society today is the outcome of issues raked up by the RSS to generate emotions in the service of Hindu nationalism. Communal violence went up across the country in the wake of the Ram Temple issue. If the country belongs to all, all religions are respected, why commit the crime of demolishing a five-hundred-year-old mosque? Why spread a communal view of history to polarise society? Why has the cow become a political issue, when Swami Vivekanand himself has stated that beef was eaten during Vedic times, and Gandhi posited that state should not take up the banning of cow slaughter or banning of beef?

One can only conclude that the RSS, having gained in confidence during last four years, is now trying to spread its net by mouthing liberal language. This velvet glow is the contribution of Mr Bhagwat to cover up the deepening divide created in society due to the all round work of the numerous progeny of the RSS, which while sounding independent are totally loyal to the training they have got while attending the shakha bauddhiks. We need to recall that when the Jan Sangh component of the Janata Party was asked to sever its links with RSS, it preferred to break the party and re-emerge as the BJP. We need to remember that the late Prime Minister Vajpayee, while addressing NRI Indians at a meeting in Staten Island, USA, reaffirmed his primary loyalty to the RSS. Clearly, the claim by Mohan Bhagwat that the RSS respects the Indian Constitution is a sham as according to the Indian Constitution, we are a secular democratic country, which is directly opposite to the soul of the RSS agenda, its espousal of the concept of Hindu nation.

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Babri Demolition: Need for Reconciliation with Justice

Ram Puniyani

In a recent judgment, the Supreme Court in a 2-1 majority verdict refused to refer the Dr. Faruqui verdict to a Constitution bench. This said verdict had stated that the mosque is not an essential part of Islamic practice. In the recent judgment, the dissenter judge felt that the matter needs to be referred to the seven judge Constitution bench. There was a feeling that “mosque not being a part of essential Islamic practice” might have had an impact on the 2010 Allahabad Court verdict which had divided the Babri mosque land into three parts, and be given to the Sunni Waqf Board, Nirmohi Akhara, and the party representing ‘Ram Lalla Virajman’. The argument in favor of the Faruqui case was that Namaz can be offered in an open place as well, so the mosque is not an essential part of Islamic practice. On the other side the argument was: there are so many mosques worldwide, why are these mosques there if a mosque is not a part of Islamic practice? Surely this point did deserve a deeper consideration as it has larger implications for society.

Now the path is paved for the hearing of the land dispute related to the Ayodhya case. Though the

Allahabad High Court had divided the land into three parts, the basis of that was not land records but the faith of large number of Hindus—that Lord Ram was born there. How do we solve land disputes—through land records or through the faith of the people? This faith has been an outcome of the political campaign for Ram temple orchestrated by the RSS combine, led initially by VHP and later by BJP. Can this faith determine the direction of our judicial system?

As regards the claim of Ram temple having been destroyed in Ayodhya over five centuries ago, this is very doubtful. One recalls that at the time when the Ram temple was supposed to have been demolished, one of the biggest devotees of Lord Ram, Goswami Tulsi Das, was living in Ayodhya. He has not recorded it in any of his writings. On the contrary Tulsi Das, in one of his couplets, writes that he can very well live in a mosque. The faith that Lord Ram was born in the said Ram temple and that it was demolished and Babri Masjid constructed in its place has been constructed over a period of time, and this has intensified during the last few decades.

One of the great documentary film makers of our times, Anand Patwardhan, in his classic documentary *Ram Ke Naam* (In the Name of Ram) shows many Pujaris (Priests) of many Ram temples in Ayodhya claiming that Lord Ram was born in their particular temple. This clearly proves that the claim that Lord Ram was born in the place where Babri Masjid had stood is a myth that is being deliberately propagated by the RSS combine for its vested interests.

There are other problems too that are related to this dispute. One is the crime of installing Ram Lalla idols inside the mosque, which is very well recorded. We know that efforts to remove the idols immediately were thwarted by the district magistrate of the region, K.K. Nayyar, who after his retirement joined the BJP predecessor Bhartiya Jansangh. The second crime, the one of demolition of the mosque in broad day light, despite the undertaking given by the then Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh to the Supreme Court, is very well known. The Liberhan Commission which went into the issue tells us that it was a conspiracy. BJP leaders Lal Krishna Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharati who were on the stage from where Kar Sevaks were being incited were rewarded for their crime as they later became ministers in the Central Government. Whatever happened to the dictum 'punish the guilty'?

The nation was witness to journalists being beaten and their cameras being broken when they were recording the act of crime. Surely, the crime of demolition must be punished. Secondly, the land dispute needs to be resolved on the basis of land records. The land has been in possession of the

Sunni Waqf Board for centuries. In 1885, the Court did not permit Hindus to construct a temple on a raised platform (chabutara) near the mosque. Even now the land records should be clear on the issue.

There are attempts by some people for a 'peaceful' 'out of Court settlement' of the issue. This initiative fully articulates the wishes of the RSS combine. They are asking Muslims to forgo their claim on the land and allow the temple to come up there. In lieu of that they are being promised that they will be given land to build the mosque somewhere else. There are also threats that when the BJP gets a suitable majority in Parliament, the temple will be constructed there through a legislation of the Parliament.

Reconciliation is a process wherein both parties are listened to, and with some 'give and take' on both sides, the issue is undertaken for resolution. This formula that the Muslims give up the land for temple construction is a very highhanded attempt to browbeat them into a total submission. What we need is an honest attempt to punish the guilty and abide by the law to solve the problem. There can't be peace without justice. The crime of Babri demolition is being valorised as 'Hindu Shaurya Divas' (Hindu Bravery Day) by the RSS combine. As such, it is a shame on our democracy! It is an outcome of divisive communal politics, and is pushing our society into the dark abyss of stagnation and diversion. Our core issues are actually bread-butter, shelter and employment. The RSS combine has built its social and political strength around emotive issues like Ram Temple and Holy Cow at the cost of the genuine

issues of society. We do need to build hospitals and schools; we do take measures to generate employment. In place of debating on this, the coming up of the Ayodhya issue just when elections to several states and the Centre are due, is so unfortunate. Rather than discussing the core issues of society, the question of Temple and Mosque will take the centre stage during the elections! How can we as a nation bring back the people's agenda to the centre stage should be the central concern for all those committed to marching towards a society that has justice, equality, democracy and secularism as its central focus.

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Bhagat Singh on Netaji Bose and Nehru

Apoorvanand

September 28 is the birthday of Bhagat Singh—a day to remember him and his legacy. Even 84 years after his death, he remains an eternal youth icon. Indeed, there are often complaints that the overarching presence of Gandhi and Nehru has deprived Bhagat Singh and revolutionaries like him their due place in Indian history. The complainers cite Subhash Chandra Bose as the other example.

Bhagat Singh and Bose, we are reminded, were revolutionaries who took the violent path to fight against the British. The two are seen as uncompromising fighters, whereas Gandhi and Nehru are portrayed as manipulators who negotiated their way to power. It is believed seriously by many that had India achieved freedom through the means used by Bhagat Singh and Bose, the Indian story would have been different.

In popular Indian perception, Bhagat Singh and Bose were made of the same metal, while Bose and Nehru were the two poles of pre-Independence Indian politics. Nehru was the one who supposedly led a comfortable life, whereas Bose was the one who renounced the glorious Indian Civil Service and later his position in the Congress to launch a more authentic nationalist battle against the British. The same with Bhagat Singh. He courted and chose death over life. Nehru outlived them both, using cunning to enjoy power. It was he who kept Bose away from India: so scared was he that he even asked his spy agencies to keep the whole of Bose family under watch.

But how did Bhagat Singh see

the two—Bose and Nehru? What could have been his trajectory had he lived longer? Would he have joined Bose when the latter broke away from Gandhi and Nehru and went on to found Azad Hind Fauj and collaborated with Tojo and Hitler against the British? Who was his ideal between the two?

'An emotional Bengali'

In 1928, Bhagat Singh, a young man of 21, published an article in the journal *Kirati*, titled *Naye netaon ke alag-alag vichar* (Different thoughts of new leaders). In this, he compared the worldviews of Bose and Nehru. Bhagat Singh wrote the article to help the youth of Punjab choose their political path at a time when there was dejection all around over the failure of the Non-Cooperation Movement and the division among Indians was reflected in the Hindu-Muslim conflicts. Which way should they go?

Bhagat Singh was not a Congressman, nor was he a member of the Communist Party of India. The young man had not spared even Lala Lajpat Rai, the revered leader of the freedom struggle, for his communal views. So, how did he look at the two nationalist leaders? In the article, Bhagat Singh pronounces Bose as an emotional Bengali, a devotee of the ancient culture of India, and regards Nehru to be an internationalist. In his view, Bose is a soft-hearted romantic and Nehru a revolutionary. After reading the speeches of the two leaders at the Amritsar and Maharashtra Congress sessions, Bhagat Singh says that

although both of them are supporters of Poorna Swaraj, they are worlds apart in their thoughts.

He refers to a public meeting in Bombay in which Bose was the speaker and Nehru the chair. Bose's speech, including the remark that India has a special message for the world, is described as a crazy rant in the Kirati article. It remarks that Bose finds the origin of everything, including Panchayati Raj and Socialism, in ancient India and notes that Bose believes that the old times were great. Bhagat Singh finds the nationalism of Bose narrow and self-obsessed.

He then moves to Nehru's presidential speech. Nehru contradicts Bose and says that all nations feel that they have some special and unique message for the world. "I do not find anything special in my nation. Subhash Babu believes in such things." What is the difference between the two? Bose wants freedom from the British because they belong to the West and we are from the East. Nehru wants freedom because, according to him, we can change our social system by establishing self-rule. For social transformation, we need complete independence and self-rule.

Bhagat Singh says that for Bose, international politics matters only to the extent that it addresses the question of India's defence and its development. On the other hand, Nehru has come out of the narrow confines of nationalism and into the open fields of internationalism. After comparing the two leaders' thoughts, Bhagat Singh asks: "Now that we

know their views, we must make our choice.” Bose, according to him, has nothing to give to the youth to quench their intellectual thrust. He has nothing for their mind.

Shunning militant nationalism

It is remarkable that Bhagat Singh was not impressed by the nationalist rhetoric of Bose and finds Nehru intellectually more challenging and satisfying. The youth of Punjab need intellectual nourishment badly and they can get it only from Nehru: “Panjabi youth should go with him [Nehru] to understand the real meaning of revolution... The youth should firm up their thought so that in the times

of dejection and defeat they do not get deviated.”

This article of Bhagat Singh is ignored even by the Left. A few years ago, I was asked by my friend Kavita Srivastava, a well-known human rights activist, to write a leaflet on the occasion of the martyrdom day of Bhagat Singh. I had quoted heavily from this article to give a glimpse of the intellectual make-up of Bhagat Singh. I found to my shock that the organisers of the event who were to use this leaflet had deleted these portions. Srivastava explained that Leftist friends of the forum refused to believe that these were Bhagat Singh’s thoughts. When told about

the source, they said, well, this article was not significant enough.

The clarity with which Bhagat Singh could see the danger of the narrow and militant nationalism of Bose is amazing. But this is what sets him apart from other revolutionaries. Three years after the publication of this article, Bhagat Singh was hanged. Nearly 12 years after this, Bose was to flee India to shake hands with some of the biggest war criminals. Bhagat Singh’s fears about Bose were confirmed. He was not there to see them come true. How is it that we refuse to see them even today?

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The Mahatma and the Earth: Gandhi’s Ecological Vision

Vandana Shiva

The Earth has enough for everyone’s needs but not for a few people’s greed. Gandhi distilled his ecological wisdom in this famous saying.

Gandhi recognised that ecological sustainability and socio-economic justice are two sides of the same coin because we live in an interconnected world. And he brought his philosophy of compassion and nonviolence to bear on our relationship with the earth.

Whenever we engage in production and consumption patterns that are non-sustainable, we are engaging in violence and triggering further violence. Nonsustainability leads to taking others share of their ecological space, and shrinking ecological space for nature’s renewal and other’s rights. A violent economic model based on greed therefore leads to violent conflicts in society, and even conflicts between humans and other animals. Most

significantly, violent economies need violent governance where governments pass laws and make policies to prevent people from using their resources sustainably and equitably for their basic needs, in order to ensure that the earth’s resources can be monopolised by violent economies of the greed of a few.

While times have changed, the patterns of colonisation stay the same, based on violence, destruction of people’s freedoms and economies, taking what is not yours, collecting unjust rents, creating constructs of divide and rule, and supremacy.

On the other hand, the patterns of liberation and freedom are perennial. And these contours of freedom were comprehensively shaped by Gandhi.

Over the past four and a half decades of serving the earth, ecology movements, and building movements against Corporate Globalisation, greed and the rule of Big Money,

I have taken inspiration from 3 principles that Gandhi distilled from the struggles and practice of freedom through history—Swaraj (self organisation, self rule, freedom as autopoiesis), Swadeshi (self making, self reliance and creating local economies) and Satyagraha (force of truth, of creative Civil Disobedience)

Swaraj

Swaraj is the basis of Real Freedom in Nature and Society, beginning at the smallest level and emerging at higher levels. It allows the thriving of biological and cultural diversity both of which are under threat today.

“Swaraj” defined India’s freedom movement. It encompassed not just political freedom, but also economic freedom. Gandhi’s Hind Swaraj has been, for me, the best teaching on real freedom in the context of Industrialism and Empire.

It has become even more relevant in the search for freedom in times of corporate rule (also referred to as corporate globalisation and neoliberal economic reform).

Swadeshi

Swadeshi literally is self making, of creating local living economies based on local resources, indigenous knowledge, and community. It reduces our ecological footprint while enlarging our consciousness and intelligence. It allows the expression of our fullest creativity as human beings and as Earth Citizens. In Swadeshi we are co-creative with nature's intelligence, creativity, and regenerative potential, and the creativity and intelligence of our fellow human beings. Co-creativity with nature creates abundance by combining production, conservation, renewal, and regeneration in one continuous cyclical and circular economy of permanence, based on the law of return, of giving back to nature and society, on sharing and caring. This is the foundation of sustainability. It is not a linear extractive economy that is polluting, degrading to the planet and to human communities.

Swadeshi is the core of economic democracy. It is the source of Real Wealth, of well being and happiness for all.

Swadeshi is based on local economies that grow into national economies, and finally into a planetary economy, in alignment with nature and people's real freedoms, and real wealth creation and well being at every level.

While the international financial and trade organisations coerce and push the government into a blind and indiscriminate experiment with globalisation, Gandhi reminds us of

the economics of 'localisation' and local self rule.

Satyagraha

Satyagraha, or the force of truth, is Gandhi's word for non-cooperation with and non-participation in systems, structures, laws, paradigms and policies that destroy the earth and rob us of our humanity and our freedoms, that crush our potential for compassion and sharing, that atrophy our hearts, our minds, our hands.

The force of truth is the highest power for change, for freedom from unjust rule, the power to seed freedom and through our freedom, seed the future.

As Gandhi said, *As long as the superstition exists that unjust laws must be obeyed, so long will slavery exist.*

Gandhi first used Satyagraha in South Africa in 1906 to refuse to cooperate with the laws of the apartheid regime imposing compulsory registration on the basis of race. The contemporary movements against apartheid—"separation"—on the basis of religion and race, are a continuation of the spirit of Gandhi, Mandela, Martin Luther King.

When Gandhi returned to India from South Africa in 1915, he was called to Champaran by our freedom fighters—like Dr Rajendra Prasad, who became the President of India after we gained Independence—to strengthen the movement of peasants against the forced cultivation of Indigo.

2017 was the hundredth anniversary of the Indigo Satyagraha in Champaran. The Indigo Satyagraha was based on the refusal to grow Indigo. The peasants had repeatedly said, "We would rather die than

grow indigo." But it was Gandhi's arrival to support the peasants of Champaran, and being stopped by a magistrate on his arrival, that triggered the Satyagraha.

The British had introduced Salt Laws to prohibit the Indian populace from producing or selling salt independently; instead, Indians were required to buy expensive, heavily taxed salt that often was imported. To protest against these unjust laws, Gandhi undertook the Salt March, walked to Dandi Beach, picked up salt from the sea saying, "Nature gives it for free, we need it for our survival. We will continue to make salt. We will not obey your laws." The Salt Satyagraha spread rapidly to the forest regions, and became the Forest Satyagraha against the British appropriation of community forests. Chipko, which I call my university of ecology, had its roots in the Forest Satyagraha of 1930 in Tilari in Garhwal. The Salt Satyagraha inspired Navdanya's Seed Satyagraha and Seed Freedom movement.

Satyagraha, the force of truth, is more important than ever in our age of "post truth". Satyagraha was, and has always been, about awakening our conscience, our inner power, to resist external, brute power. It is an autopoietic response to an externally imposed cruel and unjust system.

Satyagraha is the deepest practice of democracy, a "No" from the highest consciousness—the moral duty to not cooperate with unjust and brute law and exploitative and undemocratic processes because there are higher ecological and laws of humanity we must obey to be members of one planet, one humanity.

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Declaration (edited by us) adopted by

National Convention of Workers

28 September 2018, Mavlankar Hall, New Delhi

The National Convention of Workers jointly called by the ten Central Trade Unions, in association with all independent National Federations of Workers and Employees, of both Industrial and Service sectors viz., Banks, Insurance, Central Government and State Government employees, Defence Production employees etc., expresses serious concern over the deteriorating situation in the national economy due to the pro-corporate, anti-national and anti-people policies pursued by the Central Government, grievously impacting the livelihood of the working people across the country.

This National Convention unanimously condemns in strongest terms the conspiratorial and authoritarian attack of the present Government to deprive the biggest Central Trade Union in the country, the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) from all representations in the tripartite and bipartite fora and committees, including the international forum. This is nothing but a severe and heinous onslaught on the rights of the entire trade union movement.

The Convention notes with utter dismay that the Government has been continuing to arrogantly ignore the 12 point Charter of Demands being jointly pursued by the entire trade union movement of the country. Despite numerous nationwide joint strike actions, the most prominent being those of 2 September 2015 and 2 September 2016, participated by crores of workers against the policies of the Governments, the ruling regime at the centre has been

increasing its onslaught on the rights and livelihood of the working people of the country. Both the organised as well as unorganised sectors are victims alike.

Unemployment situation is getting aggravated with employment generation practically turned negative even in the most labour intensive sectors. The phenomenon of closure and shut-down of industries and the forecast of huge job-loss in the IT sector is adding fuel to the fire. Price-rise of petroleum products and essential commodities, including public transport, electricity, medicines, etc, is increasing pressure on daily life of the people in general, leading to widening as well as deepening of impoverishment. The implementation of GST has further compounded the hardships. Even essential and lifesaving medicines have been subjected to hefty GST. Drastic cut in Government expenditure in social sector and various welfare schemes has made the condition of workers, particularly those in unorganised sector, more precarious.

The estimates by independent surveys and those sponsored by employers' organisations revealed loss of 70 lakh jobs because of closure of 2.34 lakh small factory units in the first few months after demonetisation. The livelihood loss of another 6 crore people in informal economy and about 17 lakh job losses in organised sector speaks about the grim ground reality. Faced with such pathetic records, the Government is busy concocting statistics to make fraudulent claims on employment generation. The regular employment

survey conducted by the Labour Ministry has been discontinued.

The anti-labour authoritarian character of the government is all the more evident in its refusal to implement even the consensus recommendations (in which the Government was also a party) of the successive Indian Labour Conferences (ILC) in respect of equal pay and benefits for equal work for contract workers, formulation of minimum wage based on the norms agreed by 15th ILC / Supreme Court Judgment and grant of workers' status for scheme workers, viz., Anganwadi, Mid-Day-Meal, ASHA, MGNREGA and domestic workers etc. Shockingly, the present Government is even refusing to implement the recent judgments of the Supreme Court on the most genuine issue of "equal wage and benefits for equal work" and on EPS, 1995 on contribution and calculation of pension on actual pay and dearness allowance.

In the vast construction sector, which has a huge unorganised workforce, the government is not taking proper action on the ruling of the Supreme Court regarding construction workers cess fund and its utilisation in the interest of the construction workers. Nearly 2.5% of the population of every city are the street vendors. The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulating Street Vending) Act, 2014 has been enacted to protect them, but it is being systematically scuttled.

Despite opposition of all the trade unions in the country, the government has been aggressively

pushing through its programme of pro-employer and anti-worker labour law reforms. It has decided to amalgamate 44 hard-earned Central Labour Laws and replace them by four anti-worker, pro-employer Labour Codes to allow the employers to 'hire and fire' in the name of 'Ease of doing Business', 'Make in India', 'Start Up', etc. This is going to impose conditions of slavery on the working people. The latest onslaught is the move to evolve a 'Social Security Code' by dismantling and demolishing the existing statutory Social Security infrastructure under Employees Provident Fund Organisation, Coal Mines Provident Fund and Employees State Insurance Corporation and many other welfare statutes, abolition of welfare related cess, and usurp the huge social security fund contributed to by the workers, amounting to more than Rs 24 lakh crore and make it available for speculation in share market under the most deceptive and fraudulent camouflage of 'universalisation of social security'.

The proposed code on Occupational Safety & Health (OSH) is very dangerous move related to Occupational Safety and Health including the welfare of the factory and service sector working class.

Privatisation of all strategic PSUs, including defence production, public sector banks and insurance, railways, public road transport, oil, power, steel, coal, etc. through disinvestment, strategic sale, outsourcing in favour of private sector, promoting 100 per cent FDI in many vital and strategic sectors is increasing day by day. Stripping all the cash rich PSUs of the investible cash reserves is an added assault. The worst and most dubious step of all is the game plan to outsource more than 50 percent

products so long being produced by the Ordnance establishments, including weapons and critical equipments,. More than 250 items manufactured by Ordnance Factories have been notified as non-core. Orders are being given to private players for supply of some of these items. Government is determined to close down 5 Ordnance Factories manufacturing items used by our soldiers and officers and this would render thousands of workers jobless, including 1600 female tailors. The move to privatise the defence sector will destroy manufacturing capability and research initiatives developed by the country over last six and half decades.

Step by step, the government is moving to completely privatise the railways. Operating private trains on the existing tracks built by railways is being permitted. Private operators are being offered free access to railway yards, sheds and workshops for maintenance of private coaches, wagons and engines etc. Already 23 railway stations, all in metro cities, have been shortlisted for privatisation. More than 600 Railway Stations along with land around them have been identified for development through private players in the name of "redevelopment of Railway Stations and land around them". Workers not only in Railways but in all Government and Public Sector Undertakings shall be the worst victims of privatisation in terms of job security, democratic trade union rights and protection of achievements in the areas of pay, perks, social security, etc. Like Central Electricity Regulatory Authority (CERC), a Railway Development Authority (RDA) has been created. Given the sky-rocketing increase in electricity tariff by CERC, under RDA too, railway fare and goods freight are poised

to be hiked, hurting the common people and benefiting the private profiteers.

The exposures of various corruptions by the BJP led NDA Government at the centre shows the real face of the ruling clique, the latest being the unearthing of the Rafael deal, which is the biggest scam to date.

Public Sector Banks are under attack through various legislative and executive measures. The ultimate target of the government is privatisation and extending undue favours to the very same private corporate crooks whose default in paying back the loans given to them has put the banking sector in severe difficulties. Instead of addressing the problems of NPA and acting against the corporate defaulters, the government is going ahead with its scheme of merger of banks, which in reality will lead to closure of numerous branches, resulting in job-losses and narrowing of the outreach of the PSU Banks.

NPAs have crossed Rs 13 lakh crore. After Vijay Mallya, now Neerav Modi and Mehul Choksy have also dodged the Indian system and run away after looting Indian people's money. The government brought the FRDI Bill, which was opposed tooth and nail by the unions, forcing the government to withdraw it. But now the government has come out with the 'Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code', which is aimed at allowing corporate defaulters to default on a major part of their debt under the camouflage of so-called "resolution process of insolvency". Banks will get back hardly 30 per cent of their due loan amount. This is another big scam in the making which would further damage the crises ridden economy.

Attempts are being made by many state governments to dismantle

public sector road transport by issuing route-permits to private parties. The central government intends to get the new Motor Vehicle (Amendment) Bill 2017 hastily passed in the Parliament, which will allow wholesale privatisation of road transport on the one hand and impose draconian measures on the road transport workers, including those in private sector. The Rajasthan Road Transport Workers Union is spearheading a militant struggle against a precursor of this bill (Road Transport & Safety Bill, 2014) by forging alliance with other trade unions in the sector. This Convention condemns the state governments' and Central Government's anti-people and anti-worker moves in the transport sector.

The National Convention of Workers extends full solidarity to the fighting farmers in various states as well as under the Joint National Forums of Peasants' Organisations, and also the struggle of STs for implementation of Forest Rights Act, 2006. It is the same set of pro-corporate, pro-landlord policies which have created a severe crisis in agriculture, biggest livelihood provider in the economy, leading to continuing suicides of farmers in the country.

This National Convention of Workers records its strong denunciation of the communal and divisive machinations in society being carried on with the active patronage of the government machinery. The BJP Governments are using draconian UAPA, NSA as well as the agencies of CBI, NIA, IT to harass and suppress any dissenting opinions. The peace loving secular people in the country are facing a stark situation of terror and insecurity all around. Communal forces are cultivating an atmosphere of conflicts in the society on non-

issues. It is disrupting the unity of the workers and the toiling people, so vital to carry forward the ongoing struggles against the anti-people policies of the government. Working class must raise its strong voice of protest.

This anti-people, anti-workers and anti-national policy regime has not only been imposing increasing miseries on the toiling people at large, it is also severely damaging the national economy and destroying its indigenous productive and manufacturing capabilities to serve the interests of the multinational companies with Indian corporates as their junior partner. This anti-people and anti-national policy regime must be defeated squarely to force pro-people changes in policies on all fronts.

For this, the task before the Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions and independent national federations is to further intensify the surging struggles in various sectors through a concerted united agitation and mobilisation at national level to be followed by countrywide general strike action as a culmination and consolidation of all sectoral struggles. The National Convention of workers therefore adopts the following programmes:

- State level, district level and industry/sector level joint conventions to be held during October–November 2018
- Joint Industry-level gate meetings, rallies, etc. during November–December, 2018
- Two days countrywide General Strike on 8–9 January 2019.

The National Convention calls upon working people across the sectors and throughout the country irrespective of affiliations to make the above programmes a total success.

INTUC, AITUC, HMS, CITU, AIUTUC, TUCC, SEWA, AICCTU, LPF, UTUC, and Independent Federations / Associations Of Workers And Employees

12 Point Charter Of Demands

1. Urgent measures for containing price-rise through universalisation of public distribution system and banning speculative trade in commodity market.
2. Containing unemployment through concrete measures for employment generation.
3. Strict enforcement of all basic labour laws without any exception or exemption and stringent punitive measures for violation of labour laws.
4. Universal social security cover for all workers.
5. Minimum wages of not less than Rs 18,000/- per month with provisions of indexation.
6. Assured enhanced pension not less than Rs 3,000/- per month for the entire working population.
7. Stoppage of disinvestment / strategic sale of Central/State PSUs.
8. Stoppage of contractorisation in permanent perennial work and payment of same wage and benefits for contract workers as regular workers for same and similar work.
9. Removal of all ceilings on payment and eligibility of bonus, provident fund; increase in the quantum of gratuity.
10. Compulsory registration of trade unions within a period of 45 days from the date of submitting application; and immediate ratification of ILO Conventions C 87 and C 98.
11. Against Labour Law Amendments.
12. Against FDI in Railways, Insurance and Defence.

*Letter to Editor***Killing of Apple Employee Vivek Tiwari and Lawlessness in UP****Umar Khalid**

In their moment of grief, I wish to express my complete solidarity with family members of Vivek Tiwari. His killing by the trigger happy UP police is a direct outcome of the policy of complete impunity given by the Yogi Adityanath to the police to kill citizens. We can't even imagine the pain and grief of Vivek's family. But it is time we ask some difficult questions to the lawless Yogi government.

Even as media has woken up to the reality of fake encounters, they are not reporting that there have been over 1400 encounters in UP since Yogi Adityanath became the CM. Vivek Tiwari is the 68th person to die at the hands of the trigger happy UP police ever Yogi Adityanath became the CM. Just two days back, some of us from #UnitedAgainstHate had gone to the meet the family members of Mustakeem (22 years old) and Naushad (17 yrs), two youth who had been shot dead in a fake encounter in Aligarh about 9 days back. The police had not only killed the two youth (one of them a minor), they had terrorised the family members (all women). The inhumanity of the government can be gauged from the fact that when we reached their homes, the family of the deceased was without food for almost 2 days as the police was not allowing anyone to meet them, or even give them food. The police had raided their homes and had seized all their identity proofs such as Aadhar card and PAN cards.

In each case of encounter killing prior to Vivek's killing, the police has justified its action stating that they had gunned down dreaded criminals. Naushad and Mustakeem were poor labourers earning 2000–2500 rupees

a month, and were picked up from their homes, shot dead, and after their death branded as criminals. They had no crime record in the past. It is so easy to kill someone and then brand them as criminals. Moreover, can the claims of UP be ever taken on face value? The same UP police that a few days back beat up a woman for being friends with a Muslim man? The same UP police that supervised the lynching of Qasim in Hapur? There is complete breakdown of law and order in Uttar Pradesh under Yogi Raj!

We should demand that in all the cases of encounter killings that have taken place in UP, there has to be an independent investigation. The UP police or any other investigative agency that comes under the direct control of BJP led governments can't be expected to carry out a fair enquiry. An enquiry, under a sitting judge, has to be initiated to reach the truth of each encounter killing. The onus is on the police to prove that they actually shot in self-defense. After all, the dead can't come back to prove their innocence.

Prof. G. D. Agarwal dies in efforts to save the Ganga

Prof. G.D. Agarwal, who has been on an indefinite fast since 22nd June demanding effective action to clean Ganga, has died of a cardiac arrest at the age of 86.

Dr. Agarwal refused to take water two days ago, as none of the State Governments of the Gangetic basin, the Central Environment Ministry, the Water Resources Ministry or the Prime Minister's Office did anything at all to respond to his Sathyagraha and take action to clean the Ganga and save her for posterity. Dr. Agarwal also demanded government must stop construction of hydroelectric projects along the river's tributaries and enact the Ganga Protection Management Act to ensure the river has a chance to come back to life.

Dr. Agarwal has served as a faculty member of IIT Kanpur, guided the Central Pollution Control Board as Member Secretary in taking tough action against industrial and urban polluters, and ensure our rivers flow free and healthy. He inspired thousands by his ascetic life and dedication to

environmental causes.

Dr. Agarwal has died due to the callousness of the Government not taking action to stop the river's pollution. He has also died due to the unwillingness of the Judiciary to enforce multiple rulings about tackling the river's pollution. From the high reaches of the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal, this mighty river is being intensely polluted and its watershed extensively destroyed. Yet, no one has gone to jail. But the one man who gave everything he could to save the river, has now been put to death.

We must force the Government to take immediate steps to stop destroying the Ganga, and all other rivers. The Indian Government is seriously compromising the nation's ecological, economic and health security by promoting reckless dam building, over extraction of water, deforestation, wanton industrial and urban pollution, sand mining, river linking, and promoting land-use changes destroying riverine watersheds. This must end.

India's Private Banks and Private Investors: False Theory, Dangerous Consequences

Hemindra Hazari

India's private sector banks were held up for years as the standard of efficiency and corporate governance to which public sector banks should aspire. But now it emerges that private bank after private bank has in fact been harbouring bad debts, fudged accounts, engaged in corrupt deals and gross mismanagement, and overly paid CEOs and delinquent boards.

These revelations should not be treated as an unrelated series of incidents. It is time to question the theoretical underpinnings of the Reserve Bank of India's hitherto 'hands off' style of regulating these banks. And time for us to realise that what goes on inside the banks concerns not only the banks but the economy as a whole.

According to the currently reigning economic doctrine, self-interest ensures efficient outcomes. We are told that the private sector, acting in its rational self-interest, chooses wisely, but the public sector tends to be guided by political pressures and corruption. Hence the alleged "phone banking" of government-owned banks: that is, public sector bankers were said to have taken credit decisions based on phone calls from bureaucrats and politicians for favoured industrialists.

Correspondingly, the reigning doctrine presumes that when banks are listed on the capital market, and foreign and institutional investors buy sizeable stakes in them, the boards and managements of these banks would exercise due diligence, ensure transparency and protect

shareholders' interests. Under the eagle eye of private investors, corporate governance standards in these banks would rise.

Private sector governance on display

Indeed, a few years ago, the Committee to Review Governance of Boards of Banks in India (the Nayak Committee) raised the alarm over the "fragile" state of bad debt-ridden public sector banks (PSBs). In its Report of May 2014, it contrasted the weak and disempowered state of PSB boards with the relatively active and engaged nature of the boards of private sector banks. It therefore recommended that the government stake in all PSBs be brought below 50 per cent. Further, it called for the creation of a category of Authorised Bank Investors, who could hold a stake of 20 per cent in the bank without regulatory approvals, or 15 per cent if they also had a seat on the bank board.

This notion of the superior quality of private sector governance has not fared too well in the last few months. The newspaper reading public has witnessed the spectacle of Chanda Kochhar's brazen conflict of interest at ICICI Bank, Shikha Sharma's mismanagement at Axis Bank, the lack of accounting integrity at both Axis Bank and at Rana Kapoor's Yes Bank, and the complete collapse of corporate governance by Ravi Parthasarthy's team at Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services Ltd (IL&FS). In all these cases, the boards of the banks, decorated with 'independent'

directors, played the role of either mute spectators or cheerleaders for the delinquent managements.

What has not been remarked on is that this has happened despite significant foreign institutional holding in these listed entities, and despite the presence of prestigious foreign and domestic institutional investors' nominee directors on the board of the IL&FS (which is unlisted). Where scattered, less-informed shareholders might not be able to influence the management of a firm, these were cases of concentrated, well-informed, and at times board-represented investors. According to the reigning dogma, the significant foreign and domestic institutional ownership in these entities should have resulted in better corporate governance standards in them, failing which they would have been disciplined by the market. But in reality, no such thing took place.

Cooking the books

In the case of Axis Bank, on July 27, 2017, nearly 10 months before Shikha Sharma's (managing director and CEO of Axis Bank) term was coming to an end, the board of directors announced a fourth three-year term for her, commencing from June 1, 2018. This was after the bank had reported a 56 per cent fall in net profits for the year ended March 31, 2017, and simultaneously reported that it had fudged its accounts for the year ended March 31, 2016 by overstating its net profits and under-reporting its non-performing loans. Shareholders received a further jolt a few months later on October

17, 2017, when the bank reported that the Reserve Bank of India had found that Axis had misreported its financials for March 31, 2017 as well.

In the capital market, cooking the books is meant to be an extremely serious offence, as the market valuation of companies is said to be based on the financial accounts, as is senior management's compensation. Therefore, following any mis-statement of accounts, the board should have held the CEO responsible and removed the individual, and if the board failed to do it, institutional shareholders should have exerted pressure on the board to adopt this stringent punishment. The shareholding pattern of Axis Bank on July 21, 2017 reveals foreign holding of 52.55 per cent and Indian mutual fund holding of 7.54 per cent. Despite information in the public domain that Axis Bank had fudged results for the year ended March 31, 2016, not only did the board prematurely announce a fourth three-year term for Shikha Sharma, but the majority of shareholders did not seem to object to such an individual being appointed by the board for a fourth term.

A similar story unfolded in Yes Bank, where the bank reported two successive years of fudged accounts for the years ended March 31, 2016 and 2017. The bank's shareholding pattern as on March 31, 2018 shows foreign portfolio investors' holding at 42.6 per cent, Indian mutual funds at 10.3 per cent, and insurance companies (excluding Life Insurance Corporation) at 14.2 per cent. In Yes Bank's case, not only did the board decide to re-appoint the promoter-CEO Rana Kapoor for another 3-year term commencing September 1, 2018, but the shareholders at the annual general

meeting held on June 12, 2018 with an "overwhelming majority" approved the decision. The majority shareholders, consisting of foreign and private sector institutional investors who manage other people's money, were content to appoint a serial mis-reporter for another 3-year term.

Interestingly, the Nayak Committee did mention the incentives for 'evergreening' (i.e., covering up bad debt by extending more loans to the borrower to avoid default) in private banks, and it called for some measure of RBI random inspection to check this. But this point of the Committee's report, however inadequate, has been selectively buried, and only its pro-'liberalisation' recommendations have been publicised.

Promoter rewards himself at the cost of shareholders

The case of Kotak Mahindra Bank (KMB) is also interesting. In its February 28, 2005 guideline, the RBI emphasised diversified ownership, and laid down that a single entity or group of related entities could hold a maximum of 10 per cent in a bank; higher levels required RBI approval.

Thereafter, as per the RBI's revised guidelines for licensing of new private banks issued on February 22, 2013, it stated that the promoter should have a maximum shareholding of 15 per cent "within 12 years from the date of commencement of business of the bank." For KMB, the RBI's latest guideline meant that by February, 2015, the promoters' shareholding should have been 15 per cent. However, for Uday Kotak, the RBI gave extraordinary 'regulatory forbearance' (i.e. leniency) to reduce the promoter holding in KMB to 20 per cent by December 31, 2018 and

15 per cent by March 31, 2020. In all, that amounts to an extension of five years. As on June 30, 2018 the promoter's stake in KMB was 30 per cent while foreign portfolio investors was 39.93 per cent and Indian mutual funds was 6.85 per cent.

Thus as KMB's share price has consistently risen (from Rs 657 as on March 31, 2015 to Rs 1,342 as on June 30, 2018), the regulator's forbearance has resulted in a huge notional loss to the non-promoter shareholders of KMB, and corresponding undue gain to the promoters. The undue gain is estimated by this writer to be \$ 2.3 bn (Rs 156 bn, or Rs 15,600 crore). This analysis factors the gains (capital + dividends) accruing to the promoters by not selling their excessive shareholding (i.e. beyond 15 per cent) on March 31, 2015. The foreign portfolio and Indian mutual funds did not protest that this huge gain could have accrued to them instead of the promoter if the RBI had insisted on the promoter shareholding being reduced to 15 per cent by March 31, 2015. Worse, in an audacious move, the board of KMB issued 'preference capital', which is akin to debt and has no ownership and voting rights, and tried to include it in 'paid-up capital'. They thereby claimed that, following this issue, the promoter stake came to 19.7 per cent of capital, conforming to the RBI norm. The RBI rightly rejected this classification.

Passive 'sophisticated' investors

The combined market capitalisation of KMB, Axis and Yes Bank, at Rs 417,727 crore, is very significant as compared with SBI's Rs 236,502 crore. In all three cases of private banks, foreign investors and Indian mutual funds own collectively either the majority of shares, or more than the promoter, but in none

of the cases did these shareholders exert their influence on the board of directors to adopt measures which would benefit the non-promoter shareholders. In all the three banks, the board of directors completely failed to protect the non-promoter shareholders' interests. If it had not been for the banking regulator which rejected the decisions taken by all three bank board of directors, the non-promoter shareholders would have lost out.

In IL&FS, an unlisted company focusing on developing infrastructure as a project owner and as a financier, the long reign of mismanagement of a single CEO finally resulted in huge losses for the consolidated entity in the year ended March 31, 2018, and the company began defaulting on its financial obligations by early September 2018. What is interesting to note is that it had pre-eminent shareholders who had their nominee directors on the board, such as LIC, Orix Corporation, Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, State Bank of India and HDFC. Yet during this entire duration, senior management remuneration kept increasing, even while consolidated losses were rising. Despite having nominee directors on the board, these prominent shareholders presided over a company where the important risk management committee only met once in the last four years, and apparently were unconcerned at how the business strategy was unravelling.

The purpose of diversified ownership, listing on the capital markets and the presence of nominee and independent directors is to ensure that the promoter and the executive are kept in check, that they do not exceed their authority and that independent directors protect non-promoter shareholder interests. But in all these celebrated companies, not

only did the independent directors fail in their responsibilities, but the foreign portfolio investors, Indian mutual funds and private sector insurance companies also failed to influence the management of these institutions.

Much is made about the lack of corporate governance in the PSBs and public sector financial institutions, but the recent shenanigans in the private sector banks and financial institutions reveal that mismanagement is not only rife in the board of directors, but that it is tolerated by the institutional investors, whose presence, it was claimed, would improve corporate governance and performance. What then of the claimed benefits of lowering the government stake in public sector banks?

Myths take a beating

The abject failure of major foreign and domestic investors to monitor the banks in which they invested remains something of a mystery. Why would profit-oriented investors, endowed with armies of analysts and with the power to demand detailed answers from managements, remain passive spectators as the banks went astray? One possible explanation is that, as long as the going remained good, these investors behaved like any ordinary retail investor. Like consumers who stick with a well-known brand when buying toothpaste or detergent, it seems these supposedly sophisticated investors did not bother to open the lid and look inside the box, but stuck to the big 'brands'—the management personnel celebrated in the media. That is, they preferred to remain passive rentiers, with no positive role to play. So much for the mystique of private investment.

The 'light touch' regulation

which the RBI has been following in recent years, particularly for private banks, is based on the notion of a perfectly-informed, rational, self-regulating capitalism, and within that a self-regulating financial sector. That notion should have been debunked once and for all by the experience of the global financial crisis which began in 2008; at any rate, the current mess in India's private banks has certainly refreshed that lesson.

It is important to realise, moreover, that the fate of the banks cannot be left to their boards. The 'stakeholders' in banks are not limited to the management and shareholders, or even their depositors. Banks by their nature are highly 'leveraged' institutions—their borrowings are very high in relation to their capital, and hence any sizeable deterioration of a bank's assets threatens the bank itself. At the same time, banks are critical to the functioning of the whole of a market economy—no sector of the economy can function without finance, and so when there is a banking crisis, the entire 'real economy' too goes into crisis. Even when there is not a full-blown banking crisis, a slump in bank lending, as at present, slows the entire economy.

Hence the 'stakeholders' of the banking system are all participants in the economy, that is, the entire citizenry. Any laxity with banking regulation can bring the economy to its knees. This calls for highly active, intrusive, and continuous regulation by the regulatory authorities, in particular the Reserve Bank of India. The sorry story of India's stellar private banks tells us what happens when, under the spell of some dubious theory, the RBI fails to do that job.

Hating Muslims in the Age of Trump

Juan Cole

These days, our global political alliances seem to shift with remarkable rapidity, as if we were actually living in George Orwell's 1984. Are we at war this month with Oceania? Or is it Eastasia? In that novel, the Party is able to erase history, sending old newspaper articles down the Ministry of Truth's "memory hole" and so ensuring that, in the public mind, the enemy of the moment was always the enemy. Today, there is one constant, though. The Trump administration has made Muslims our enemy of the first order and, in its Islamophobia, is reinforced by an ugly resurgence of fascism in Germany, Italy, Hungary and other European countries.

It's hard today even to imagine that, in the late 1980s, the rightwing *Christian Voice Magazine* published a "candidate's biblical scoreboard," urging its readers (and potential voters) to rate their politicians by how "biblically" they cast their ballots in Congress. One key measure of this: Did that legislator support the anti-Communist Muslim jihadis in Afghanistan, a cause warmly supported by evangelist Pat Robertson in his 1988 presidential campaign? Now, attempting to appeal to twenty-first-century evangelicals, President Trump has announced that "Islam hates us."

The kaleidoscope of geopolitics and Islamophobia is now spinning so fast that it should make our heads spin too. At times, it seems as if Donald Trump is the anti-Ronald Reagan of the twenty-first century, idolizing former KGB operative Vladimir Putin, but seeing former US allies in the Muslim world like Pakistan as purveyors of "nothing but lies and deceit"—until, that

is, with bewildering rapidity, he suddenly gives us the "good" (that is, oil-rich) Muslims again, willingly performing a sword dance with the Saudi royals, seemingly entirely comfortable with the scimitar of the Saracen.

Islamophobes Galore

While the president oscillates between abusing and fawning over the elites of the Muslim world, his true opprobrium is reserved for the poor and helpless. His hatred of refugees uprooted by the horrific Syrian civil war, for instance, stems from his conviction that this population (predominantly women and children, as well as some men fleeing the fighting) might actually be adherents of the so-called Islamic State group (also known as ISIL, ISIS, or Daesh) and so part of the building of a secretive paramilitary force in the West. He's even speculated that "this could be one of the great tactical ploys of all time. A 200,000-man army, maybe."

This summer, he also tweeted: "Crime in Germany is way up. Big mistake made all over Europe in allowing millions of people in who have so strongly and violently changed their culture!" And a day later claimed it had risen by 10%. Though immigrant communities can indeed produce some crime until they find their footing, the crime rate in Germany, despite the welcoming of two million immigrants in 2015 alone, has fallen to a 30-year low, as have crimes by non-German nationals.

Nor, of course, is there an army of terrorists the size of the active-duty forces of France or Italy among those hapless Syrian refugees. Still,

that outlandish conspiracy theory may be part of what lay behind the president's blatantly unconstitutional 2015 call for a "total and complete shut-down" of Muslims coming to the United States. Consider it a great irony, then, that some significant part of the turmoil in the greater Middle East that helped provoke waves of refugees and an Islamophobic backlash here and in Europe was, at least in part, the creation of this country, not Muslim fundamentalist madmen.

The Islamophobes like to argue that Islam is an inherently violent religion, that its adherents are quite literally commanded to such violence by its holy scriptures, the Qur'an. It's a position that, as I explain in my new book, *Muhammad: Prophet of Peace Amid the Clash of Empires*, is both utterly false and ahistorical. As it happens, you would have to look to far more recent realities to find the impetus for the violence, failed states, and spreading terror groups in today's Greater Middle East. Start with the Reagan administration's decision to deploy rag-tag bands of Muslim extremists (which al-Qaeda was first formed to support) against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s. That set in motion massive turmoil still roiling that country, neighbouring Pakistan, and beyond, decades after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Of course, al-Qaeda notoriously blew back on America. Its September 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington were then used by American neoconservatives in the administration of George W. Bush—some of whom had served in the Reagan years, cheering on the American-backed Afghan

fundamentalists, as well as their Arab allies—to set the United States on a permanent war footing in the Muslim world. The 2003 invasion of Iraq, promoted on the false pretext that Saddam Hussein’s government supported al-Qaeda, kicked off a set of guerrilla insurgencies and provoked a Sunni-Shiite civil war that spread in the region.

Hundreds of thousands would die and at least four million people, including staggering numbers of children, would be displaced over the years thanks to George W. Bush’s boondoggle. The al-Qaeda franchise ISIL (formed initially as al-Qaeda in Iraq in the wake of the US invasion) arose to expel American troops there. Ultimately, its militants made inroads in neighboring Syria in 2011 and 2012 and the US allowed them to grow in hopes of putting pressure on the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad.

As is now all too clear, such policies created millions of refugees, some of whom streamed towards Europe, only to be greeted by a rising tide of white Christian bigotry and neo-Nazism. There’s no way to measure the degree to which America’s wars across the Greater Middle East and North Africa have, in fact, changed our world. When, for instance, British Prime Minister Tony Blair signed on to Bush’s illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq, how could he have foreseen that he was helping set off events that would result in a British withdrawal from the European Union (a decision in which anti-immigrant sentiment played an outsized role)—and so the diminishment of his country?

Having helped spread extremism and set in motion massive population displacements, Western elites then developed a profound fear of the millions of refugees they had helped chase out of the Middle

East. Executive Order 13769, President Trump’s abrupt January 2017 visa ban, which created chaos at American airports and provoked widespread protests and court challenges—many of its elements were, however, ultimately upheld by the Supreme Court—appears to have been premised on the notion that a Trojan Horse of Muslim extremism was headed for American shores.

In reality, the relatively small number of terrorist attacks here by Muslim-Americans (covered so much more intensively than the more common mass shootings by white nationalists) have most often been carried out by “lone wolves” who “self-radicalised” on the Internet and who, had they been white, would simply have been viewed as mentally unbalanced.

Still, realities of that sort don’t make a dent in the president’s agenda. In 2018, the Trump administration will likely only admit about 20,000 refugees, far less than last year’s 45,000, thanks to administration demands that the FBI carry out “extreme vetting” of all applicants without being given any extra resources to do so. Of the refugees admitted in the first half of this year, only about one in six was a Muslim, while in 2016, when 84,995 refugees were admitted, they were equally divided between Christians and Muslims.

On average, the US still admits a little more than a million immigrants annually, of which refugees are a small (and decreasing) proportion. Since 2010, more immigrants have come from Asia than any other area, some 45% of them with college degrees, which means that Trump’s very image of immigrants is wrong.

His ban on immigrants from five Muslim-majority countries (Iran, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Somalia) was largely symbolic, since they

were generally not sources of significant immigration. It was also remarkably arbitrary, since it did not include Iraq or Afghanistan, where violent insurgencies and turmoil continue but whose governments host American troops. It does, however, include the relatively peaceful country of Iran.

Trump’s Muslim ban has broken up families, even as it harmed American businesses and universities whose employees (or in the case of colleges, students) have been abruptly barred from the country. The restrictions on immigration from Syria and Yemen are particularly cruel, since those lands face the most extreme humanitarian crises on the planet and the United States has been deeply implicated in the violence in both of them. Moreover, Iranians who do emigrate to the US are, for the most part, members of minorities or political dissidents. In fact, no nationals from any of those five banned states have committed lethal acts of terrorism in the United States in the last 40 years.

The Islamophobia of President Trump, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, National Security Advisor John Bolton, and others in the administration, aided and abetted by the megaphone that Rupert Murdoch’s Fox News offers, has had a distinct impact on public opinion. Attacks on Muslim-Americans have, for instance, spiked back to 2001 levels. A recent poll found that some 16% of Americans want to deny the vote to Muslim-Americans, 47% support Trump’s visa restrictions, and a majority would like all mosques to be kept under surveillance. (A frequent, if completely false, talking point of the Islamophobes is that Muslims here have a single ideology and are focused on a secret plan to take over the United States.) You undoubtedly

won't be surprised to learn that such unhinged conspiracy theories are far more prevalent among Republicans than Democrats and independents.

Similarly unsurprising is the fact that Americans in the Trump era give a lower favorability rating to Muslim-Americans (a little over 1% of the US population) than to virtually any other religious or ethnic group (though feminists and evangelicals are runners-up). By a spread of about 20 points, they believe that Muslim-Americans are both more religious than Christian Americans and less likely to respect the country's ideals and laws. They slam Muslims for according women and gays low status, though a majority of Muslim-Americans say that homosexuals should be accepted in society, a belief that Muslim-American women hold in the same percentages as the rest of the American public. As for those women, they are among the best educated of any faith group in the country, suggesting extremely supportive families.

In reality, Muslim-Americans are remarkably well integrated into this country and have committed little terrorism here. In the past decade and a half, on average, 28 Muslim-Americans a year were associated with acts of violent extremism out of a population of 3.5 million and most of those "acts" involved traveling abroad to join radical movements. Muslim-American extremists killed 17 people in 2017, a year in which white gunmen killed 267 Americans in mass shootings.

Changing Bogeymen

The Islamophobia that Donald Trump has made his own arose in the decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union, once the bogeyman of Communism was removed from the quiver of the American Right. The

1990s were hard on the Republican Party and its plutocrats (with a popular Clinton in the White House), and on the arms manufacturers facing a public increasingly uninterested in foreign adventurism with no sense of threat from abroad. The Pentagon budget was even briefly cut in those years, producing what was then called a "peace dividend." (It wasn't.) And though it's now hard to imagine, in 1995 the United States was not involved in a conventional hot war anywhere in the world.

In this no-longer-so-new century, the Republican Party, like the Trump presidency, did, however, find the bogeyman it needed and it looks remarkably like a modernised version of the rabidly anti-Communist McCarthyism of the 1950s. In fact, the endless demonisation of Muslims may be less a cudgel to wield against the small Muslim-American community than against Democratic opponents who can be lambasted as "soft on terrorism" if they resist demands to demonise Muslims and their religion.

In my own state of Michigan, Elissa Slotkin, an acting assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs in the Obama years and a former CIA analyst, is running as a Democrat in the 8th District against Congressman Mike Bishop. Slotkin played a role in developing the anti-ISIL strategies that Trump adopted when he came into office. Nonetheless, our airwaves are now saturated with pro-Bishop ads smearing Slotkin, a third-generation Michigander, for her supposed involvement in President Obama's Iran nuclear deal and so for being little short of a Shiite terrorist herself. Similarly, in San Diego, California's 50th district, the scandal-ridden campaign of Republican Congressman Duncan

Hunter (indicted for embezzling \$250,000 in campaign funds) continues to broadly insinuate that his opponent, Ammar Campa-Najjar, a Christian American of Palestinian and Mexican descent, is a Muslim Brotherhood infiltrator seeking to enter Congress.

Still, despite all the sound and fury from the White House, the US Muslim population continues to grow because of immigration and natural increase. Over the past 30 years, between 3,000 and 13,000 immigrants have arrived annually from Egypt, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Turkey, and a handful of other countries. Their governments are close geopolitical allies of the US and to interdict their nationals would be politically embarrassing, as Trump discovered when he attempted to include Iraq on his list of banned countries and was persuaded to change his mind by Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis.

Of course, not all Americans share Trump's bigotry. Two-thirds of us actually disapprove of politicians engaging in hate speech toward Muslims. Some 55% of us believe that Muslim-Americans are committed to the welfare of the country, a statistic that would break the 60% mark if it weren't for evangelicals. Two Muslim-American politicians, Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar, won Democratic primaries in Detroit and Minneapolis and so are poised to become the first Muslim-American women in the House of Representatives.

Such an outcome would be one way in which Americans could begin to reply to the wave of Islamophobia that helped lift Donald Trump into office in 2016 and has only intensified since then. The decency of Middle America has certainly been tarnished, but as the polls indicate, not lost. Not yet anyway.



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Sacrifice at the Altar of Development

Medha Patkar and Sandeep Pandey

The legendary Professor Guru Das Agrawal, who got promoted from a Lecturer directly to Professor at the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology at Kanpur after having finished his Ph.D. from University of California at Berkeley in two years, who had laid the foundation of India's anti-pollution regimen as the first Member-Secretary of Central Pollution Control Board, and who had become Swami Gyan Swaroop Sanand in 2011 at the age of 79 years, ultimately failed to convince a government about his viewpoint on rejuvenation of river Ganga and had to pay for this with his life. He died on 11 October 2018 after 112 days of fasting on lemon water and honey, last three days of which were without any water at all.

It may be intriguing why the government, which rode to power on a Hindutva agenda, did not listen to a Hindu saint, on an issue of ecological and religious significance of Ganga, which was at the core of Prime Minister's election campaign. Swami Gyan Swaroop Sanand had put forward a draft for National River Ganga ji (Conservation and Management) Act in 2012. The government came up with The National River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Bill in

2017 and updated it in 2018. The two draft Bills however, differed in their basic perspectives.

During his sixth and last fast, Swami Gyan Swaroop Sanand wrote to PM Narendra Modi on 5 August 2018 that whereas the National Environmental Appellate authority of the previous Manmohan Singh government had suspended the Lohari Nagpala hydroelectric project on his clearly articulated demands, despite some construction having taken place there, and declared a length of over hundred kilometres of Bhagirathi from Gangotri to Uttarkashi as an Eco-Sensitive Zone, which means no destructive activity could take place here, the present government had not done a thing for conservation of Ganga even after four and a half years of being in power. He repeated his four demands which he had intimated to PM before going on fast: (1) The draft prepared by him along with Advocate M.C. Mehta and Paritosh Tyagi, among others, be placed before and passed by the Parliament; (2) All under-construction and proposed hydroelectric projects on streams directly flowing into Ganga in the upper reaches, downstream and its tributaries be scrapped with immediate effect; (3) All mining and

deforestation activities be banned in the Ganga basin; and (4) Form a Ganga Bhakt Parishad whose aim would be to work to protect the interests of Ganga. He never heard from the PM till his death, even though during his fifth fast in 2013, Rajnath Singh as the then Bhartiya Janata Party president had promised to him that all his demands related to Ganga would be met if the BJP came to power at the Centre.

Professor Agrawal wanted Ganga to be declared a national symbol. His main emphasis was on conservation of Ganga in its natural pristine glory, unobstructed natural flow, which he called as *Aviral*, and unpolluted water quality, which he described as *Nirmal*. He wanted a ban on discharge of any untreated or treated sewage or industrial effluents in Ganga. Another of his demands was complete prohibition of incineration of any kind of solid waste, setting up of units discharging pollutants, deforestation, illegal stone quarrying and sand mining, building of river-front development structures and use of chemicals or hazardous substances in the vicinity of Ganga. These have become necessary if any river is to be protected against destruction and degradation. It is important to know that Professor G.D. Agrawal's important learnings emerged from his engineering experience with the Rihand dam while working for the Uttar Pradesh State Irrigation Department.

As a true scientist, Professor Agrawal precisely defined *Aviral* to mean minimum environmental/ecological flow at every place, including the downstream of each dam, and at all times with universal bed, lateral, open-to-air, longitudinal and temporal connectivities. He

believed that to preserve the unique qualities of water of Ganga—its non-putrefying, disease destroying, health enhancing and pollution destroying properties—it was necessary to ensure its *Aviral* flow. Similarly, *Nirmal* doesn't mean merely meeting the standards on water quality related to pH (measure of acidity or alkalinity), Dissolved Oxygen, Biological Oxygen Demand, Chemical Oxygen Demand, Total Dissolved Solids, Free Chlorine and Total Chlorine or water treated by Reverse Osmosis process and Ultraviolet rays. He concluded scientifically that the special 'self-cleaning' property of Ganga and its unique coliform destroying capabilities were because of the presence of bacteriophages, large amounts of exo-cellular polymers coming from trees present in Himalayan uplands, unique mix of heavy and radioactive metals, and ultra fine silt or micro nuclei in the water. It is essentially the rocks, sediment and vegetation, including medicinal plants or ecology of the upper region, that contributes to the special property of Ganga described as *Nirmal*.

Nitin Gadkari, Minister for Water Resources, Riven Basin Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, is known to have publicly said that he understands the concept of *Nirmal* but not that of *Aviral*. It is quite obvious that accepting Professor Agrawal's concept of *Aviral* would disallow construction of any more dams. Another view emanating from the ruling BJP government is that they don't care about the country, religion or its people but are only interested in 'Development.' It is very clear that the BJP's concept of 'Development' is clearly corporate driven and,

as is now well established, yields sufficient kickbacks to fund the next electoral cycle. Hence even though a senior functionary of Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, who tried to mediate, said he agreed theoretically with Professor G.D. Agrawal's vision on Ganga, the compulsions of realpolitik sealed the fate of Professor G.D. Agrawal and by extension that of Ganga. This threat will loom large on life and livelihoods of people living in other river valleys too.

Professor Agrawal had fasted five times during the United Progressive Alliance regime. However, he never faced a threat to his life. The only time he fasted during the National Democratic Alliance government's tenure proved fatal for him. This also demonstrates that the development paradigm is not sensitive to socio-cultural issues, including religion, or environmental issues, in spite of the PM having won a United Nations award, and is more brazenly pro-corporate and less humane under the present government.

The vacuum created by Professor G.D. Agrawal's demise is unfillable. Where is another strong voice for Ganga? To many religious minded people, Professor G.D. Agrawal appeared to be in the mould of the mythological figure Bhagirath, almost single-handedly taking up the cause of Ganga.

A true condolence to him would be to brace ourselves for fight against governments which believe in concept of 'development' with attendant destruction of nature, corporations which implement such misplaced and misgoverned projects, and contractors plundering natural resources including sand from the river bed and its catchment area.

Unraveling the Truth: Gujarat Carnage 2002

Ram Puniyani

The fight for conservation of Ganga is far from over. Swami Shivanand, the chief priest of Matre Sadan, the ashram in Haridwar that Professor Agrawal chose as his fast site, has warned Narendra Modi that he and his disciples will ensure that the chain of fasting begun by Swami Sanand doesn't break. One Swami Gopal Das had also begun fasting soon after Swami Sanand started his fast on 22 June, 2018. Earlier Swami Nigmanand, also associated with Matre Sadan, laid down his life in 2011 on the 115th day of his fast—it is widely believed that he was actually murdered at the behest of a mining mafia associated with the then ruling BJP government in Uttarakhand. How many more lives will be sacrificed at the altar of development?

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Communal violence has been a major painful sour of our body politic. The post-partition violence not only shook the nation no end, it also resulted in the biggest ever mass migrations in the world. But that was not the end of the story as far as divisive violence is concerned. It resurfaced, and went on intensifying, more so after the decade of 1980s when the Ram Temple movement started deepening the emotions of a section of society. There was a parallel rise of the temple movement on one side and communal violence on the other. A series of ghastly episodes of communal violence shattered the fabric of the nation seriously, one such being the Gujarat carnage of 2002. This carnage was orchestrated on the pretext of burning of a train in Godhra. The real truth of who was responsible for the burning of the train is still mired in mystery. It led to the death of 58 innocent lives, those of Kar Sevaks and their families. At this point, it was the duty of the state, that is, the state government and administration, to undertake a damage control exercise and limit the future losses of lives and property.

Unfortunately, there are reports which indicate that the state government acted in the opposite manner. It appears that in the aftermath of the train burning, a meeting was called on the same evening by Chief Minister Narendra Modi. He allegedly told the officials to go soft against the possible reaction to the train burning. This has been stated by Sanjeev Bhat, a senior police officer who was present

in the meeting. Justice Suresh who was part of the Citizens tribunal to investigate Gujarat violence also confirmed that such a thing was said in the meeting. Now this has been confirmed yet again in the autobiography of Lt. Gen. Zameer Uddin Shah, *The Sarkari Mussalman*, which was released on October 13 by the former Vice President of India, Dr. Hamid Ansari.

In his memoirs, Lt. Gen. Shah states that on the instructions from General Padmanabhan, the then Chief of General Staff, he reached Ahmedabad in the night of February 28. As he was landing in Ahmedabad, he could see the burning city. From the airport, Gen. Shah went straight to the residence of Chief Minister Narendra Modi, where the then defense minister George Fernandez was also present. It was 2 am. He gave the Chief Minister a list of immediate requirements to enable the Army columns to fan out across the city to restore law and order. At 7 am on March 1, 3000 army jawans landed at Ahmedabad airfield. But the army jawans were forced to camp at the airport for one full day, as the Gujarat government did not provide them the necessary transport, even though the city was burning. It was only on the morning of March 2 that the army road columns reached Ahmedabad, and so did the requisitioned civil trucks, magistrates, police guides and maps. This seems to confirm what Justice Suresh commented in his report as a member of Citizens tribunal.

The 'Tehelka Stings' on Babu Bajrangji, who is in jail for his role

in the Gujarat carnage, had stated that Modi had given them three days to do whatever they wanted to do. Shah's memoirs reconfirms this. The delay in army deployment for a day clearly sent out the signal to the rioters that they could continue with their mayhem.

Shah also observes that once provided with support, the army brought the mayhem under control in two days time. This brings forth the question that why is it that in India, incidents of communal violence continue for several days? Why is it that they are not quickly brought under control? Dr. Vibhuti Narain Rai, a retired DGP, says in his path-breaking study, 'Combating Communal Conflicts', that no communal violence can go on beyond 24 hours unless the state administration is complicit in it. His study draws attention to the biased nature of our police machinery, a fact which is brought out in Gen. Shah's book also. The inquiry report by the Supreme Court-appointed Special Investigative Team (SIT) records that there was no delay in deploying the armed forces. However, Gen. Shah categorically says that the SIT lied; it never approached the army for its testimony on the matter. Gen. Shah affirms that these facts are recorded in the 'After Action Taken' report that he had submitted to General Padmanabhan, and are also mentioned in the military 'war diaries'.

There is also an impression that the SIT gave a clean chit to Modi. It's not true. The Court appointed amicus curiae Raju Ramchandran in his report to the Apex Court on the SIT report had stated that there is enough in the SIT report to prosecute Modi. While the SIT did say that there is no prosecutable case against Modi, it simultaneously also observed that

Modi had a communal mindset, he visited Godhra which was 300 km away but did not go to any refugee camp right within the city till much later when Mr. Vajpayee came to visit Juhapura camp. The SIT had also observed that the decision to hand over the bodies of Godhra tragedy to Jaideep Patel of VHP was harmful. The SIT also admits that Sanjeev Bhat had attended the meeting where the administration was told to go slow. Finally, the SIT had also criticised the transfer and prosecution of upright police officers like R.B. Sreekumar, Rahul Sharma, Himanshu Bhat and Samiullah Ansari, who were penalised by the Modi regime.

This shows that it is not just the communal mindset of the people, but also the decisions of those in power, that are responsible for the loss of lives and destruction of property in communal riots. We also need to take steps to tackle the communal

mindset of our police machinery.

It's time we as a society learn from the pangs of past, as recalled by the likes of Lt. General Zameer Uddin. The other experiences shared by him in his memoirs, both as an army man and a Muslim in India, are also very instructive.

In his endorsement of the book, General Padmanabhan writes that many eyebrows were raised when he assigned Lt. Gen. Shah the task for controlling the violence in Gujarat, but he stood his ground and told the seniors objecting to his decision that the choice of troops and their leader was a military decision and not open to debate. He also compliments the ability, impartiality and pragmatic decision making of Lt. Gen. Shah that quickly brought the situation under control.

A lot to learn and set right from the memoirs of an upright officer!

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Jayaprakash Narayan: An Idealist Betrayed – Part I

M. G. Devasahayam

The imposition of the Emergency in June 1975 by Indira Gandhi led to a general uprising across the country under the leadership of Jayaprakash Narayan, popularly known as JP. It also brought together strange bedfellows—the socialists and the Jan Sangh, the political face of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). In this personal epitaph on Jayaprakash Narayan, former civil servant M.G. Devasahayam, who was "the only person who had unrestricted access" to the late JP when he was prisoner during the Emergency, explains how the JP movement fizzled out due to what he terms the "betrayal of the RSS".

JP: The Quintessential Rebel

During the freedom struggle, JP was the frontline foot soldier of Mahatma Gandhi. He never sought power and did not enjoy it even for a day. Well before Indira Gandhi was anywhere near politics, JP had been offered the posts of Union cabinet minister, prime minister and President of India in quick succession and he turned down each one of them. Though considered the natural successor to Nehru as prime minister, JP chose to withdraw from power politics to engage in the more enduring struggle against poverty, social evils and violence. JP was

an iconoclast with compassion and a product of the Magadha legacy which "not only produced relentless fighters and exterminators of kings" but "hearkened at the same time to the devout teachings of Vardhamana Mahavira and Gautama Buddha".

The man who could have become India's second Prime Minister, and possibly finished off the Nehru-Indira dynasty rule for ever, unwittingly became its perpetrator by declining to take office. Instead, he became, after Mahatma Gandhi, the second redeemer of the nation, freeing the country from the shackles of a home-brewed dictatorship, which was imposed by an unprincipled Indira Gandhi. Sometimes, leaders scale such lofty heights of national eminence that they become too big for mundane office. In post-Emergency India, JP never occupied any official seat of power and was regarded as the nation's patron saint.

Jayaprakash Narayan was born on October 11, 1902, in Sitabdiara, a village on the border of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Because of the Ganga often changing course, JP's ancestral house has been shown alternately in Bihar and UP. He became a natural leader among the village boys. JP was married to Prabhavati, daughter of lawyer and nationalist Brij Kishore Prasad, in October 1920. Prabhavati was very independent-minded and, on Gandhiji's invitation, went to stay at his ashram while JP continued his studies. Because of Prabhavati's vow of celibacy while JP was away in the USA, and his honouring the same on return, the couple did not have any children and, therefore, had no immediate family.

As he grew up and cut his teeth in public life, JP wanted to overhaul

the entire Indian society. For him, the political system had to be responsive to the aspirations of the poorest of the poor; the glaring inequalities that our economic system breeds had to end; the educational system should be geared to the needs of the nation; the canker of corruption in India's political and administrative system had to be eradicated; the various social ills that afflict our country had to end. This, in simplistic and pragmatic terms, is what JP meant by "Total Revolution". The kind of sweeping reforms JP had in mind appear like a utopian abstraction, but nobody can contest their fundamental desirability. Evidently, the initiative for such a revolution has to come from society as a whole, not just the government.

JP was a dreamer and an idealist to a fault. It was Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's fiery oratory and his call to "lift up to the skies like leaves before a storm" that drew JP to the freedom movement. Jayaprakash took the Maulana's words to heart and left Patna College with just 20 days remaining for his examinations. He joined the Bihar Vidyapeeth, a college run by the Congress. After exhausting the courses at the Vidyapeeth, Jayaprakash decided to go to America to pursue his studies. To pay for his education, Jayaprakash picked grapes, packed fruits, washed dishes, worked as a mechanic, sold lotions and accepted teaching jobs. All these jobs gave Jayaprakash insights into the problems of the working class.

JP's sojourn in America for seven years at the prestigious universities of Berkeley, Iowa, and Wisconsin only increased his passion for freedom. He was a student of Professor Edward Ross, the father of sociology, and, while

at Wisconsin, was introduced to Karl Marx's *Das Capital*. His Ohio professor observed in the young man "germs of leadership" and "aggressiveness of thought". When he returned to India in November 1929, he was "a mature young man with an enquiring mind, original in his thinking, and with the fierce, idealistic desire to devote himself to serve society". And he fully involved himself in the freedom struggle.

In February 1940, JP was arrested for speaking against Indian participation in the Second World War and sent to the Deoli detention camp in Rajasthan. He was again arrested in 1942 for participating in the Quit India Movement. In November 1942, Diwali night, JP, along with five others, escaped from the high-security Hazaribagh jail by scaling a 17-foot-high wall while the guards remained distracted by the festivities. A reward of Rs 10,000 was offered for JP's capture, dead or alive. This electrified a languishing Quit India Movement, eventually leading to independence. But JP had to pay a very heavy price for this. After nearly one year of hunt, he was arrested in Amritsar on September 18, 1943 while on his way to Rawalpindi to meet Frontier Gandhi, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan. He was taken to Lahore Fort, notorious as a "torture chamber". Sixteen months of mental and physical torture followed. JP was put in solitary confinement for the first month. Then came interrogations, physical torture and humiliation. He was released on April 12, 1946.

A.P. Sinha, a jail-mate and close friend whom JP tried to persuade to join the Hazaribagh escapade, had this exhortation to make to the latter prior to the escape:

"J.P., I am sorry I cannot make

the break with you. I want to come for the love of you and keep you company and support you. But my health is poor and I'm not sure I could be effective. I'm too deeply Gandhian. All I'll do is to hide myself. I'm only used to attending political meetings and passing resolutions. I would not be able to give you the help you need. Let me help to cover your getaway. You have got the passion that can make people's spirits soar up. You can inspire them to self-sacrifices, to accept sufferings. You are a great national leader."

Independence finally came on August 15, 1947. Within a year Gandhiji was assassinated. The Socialists lost to the Congress in the 1952 elections. Nehru invited JP to join the Cabinet. When Nehru could give no assurances on the implementation of JP's 14-point plan to reform the Constitution, the administration, the judicial system, nationalise the banks, redistribute land to the landless, revive swadeshi and set up cooperatives, he refused the offer.

On the attainment of independence, when people scrambled for loaves of office, JP stood apart, concentrating his efforts on leading the Congress Party towards the socialist path. Those were the years when some of the finest intellectuals-turned-activists in the national movement, like Narendra Dev, Yusuf Meherally, Achyut Patwardhan and Rammanohar Lohia joined hands with him, or more correctly, spurred him on in the new endeavour. He politely turned down Pandit Nehru's repeated invitations to join his cabinet. Instead, he turned his attention to the trade unions he led. With the help of the unions, he was able to get many facilities for

the workers, such as minimum wage, pension, medical relief and housing subsidy. Seeing the totalitarian ways and bloody purges unleashed in Soviet Russia, JP turned away from Communism.

From Swarajya to Revolution

He decided to dedicate himself totally to Mahatma Gandhi's ideal of 'sampoorna swarajya' and pursue his efforts towards 'people's participatory governance' and corruption-free, value-based public life. In 1954, he blended himself with Vinoba Bhave's Sarvodaya movement. He gave up his landed property and withdrew from all political activity to devote the rest of his life to the movement. He set up an 'ashram' in poor and backward Hazaribagh, trying to give Gandhian concepts a new dimension by using modern technology to uplift the villages. Even Prime Minister Nehru's suggestion in the late fifties that JP could be his successor did not lure him back to politics.

JP believed that every village should be like a small republic—politically independent and capable of taking its own decisions. It was a marriage of Gandhian-Indian concepts and modern Western democracy. His thoughtful, well-researched and brilliant book, *The Reconstruction of Indian Polity*, won him the Ramon Magsaysay Award. He was involved in the resolution of the Naxal and Naga issues and was also a key person in acquiring the surrender of dacoits in the Chambal Valley. On April 15, 1973, Prabhavati died of cancer, leaving Jayaprakash alone and devastated.

This man who had turned a recluse refusing positions of high power and authority returned to active politics in 1974 at the ripe

age of 72 when student unrest against corruption, unemployment, and high inflation spread like wild fire, threatening to turn violent and go beyond control. In the face of terror and repression unleashed on the students by the governments of Bihar and Gujarat, JP took charge and thus was born the 'JP Movement' that shook corrupt and authoritarian governments to their very foundation.

As part of the movement, on April 8, 1974, JP led a silent procession at Patna. The procession was lathi-charged and this created a mass upsurge against corruption and autocratic rule. On June 5, 1974, riding the crest of a popular upheaval against all that was rotten in governance and public life, JP declared at a massive rally in Patna:

"This is a revolution, friends! We are not here merely to see the Vidhan Sabha dissolved. That is only one milestone on our journey. But we have a long way to go. . . . After 27 years of freedom, people of this country are wracked by hunger, rising prices, corruption . . . oppressed by every kind of injustice . . . it is a Total Revolution we want, nothing less!"

When, on June 12, 1975, the Allahabad High Court held Prime Minister Indira Gandhi guilty on charge of corrupt practices in the election, JP advised her to resign until her name was cleared by the Supreme Court. Instead, she clamped the Emergency on the nation. JP was the first to be arrested under the Defence of India Rules.

JP and India's Second Freedom

India's first freedom, achieved on the midnight of 14/15th August 1947, ended on the midnight of 25/26th June 1975, when the then

President of India signed a crisp four-line proclamation virtually on command from the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi:

“In exercise of the powers conferred by clause (1) of Article 352 of the Constitution, I, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, President of India, by this Proclamation declare that a grave emergency exists whereby the security of India is threatened by internal disturbances.”

This extinction of freedom in the country brought about an eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation between Indira Gandhi, the self-appointed dictator, and Jayaprakash Narayan, popularly known as JP, the congenital democrat. While the former was the epitome of power and pelf, the later abjured all desire for power, but wielded immense moral authority. By the time the confrontation ended in March 1977, JP had won with India regaining its Freedom.

Acknowledging this, veteran journalist Kuldip Nayyar said in his 24th JP Memorial Lecture:

“He wasn't built to be a hero: slight of figure, racked by illness, battle-worn. Yet, he proved to be the outstanding hero who won us the second freedom in 1977, 30 years after the first one.”

Freedom has been India's path ever since independence, a path chosen by the founding fathers of our Republic under extremely trying circumstances. Despite all trials and tribulations and its many imperfections, India today is being lauded as the largest democracy on earth practicing freedom, however imperfect it may be. For JP, considered among the greatest revolutionaries of the last century, freedom had always been a passion.

JP had ‘worked and marched,

fought and died for the triumph of freedom’ in a country wherein live one-sixth of the human race. And he did it not once, but twice—as a fiery fighter for freedom from alien rule under Gandhiji's leadership and later winning it back from a native ‘durbar’ under his own stewardship. Elsewhere in the world, such a man would be celebrated with gratitude. But here in this ‘Republic of Jumlas’ and land of ‘cash-and-crime politics’, he is near-totally forgotten.

During the 20 months of active Emergency spanning the years 1975 to 1977, people moved in hushed silence, stunned and traumatised by the draconian goings on. Across the nation, groveling academicians, advocates and accountants vied with each other to sing paeans of glory to the Emergency rulers, some signing pledges of loyalty and servitude in blood! The bulk of the civil service crawled when asked to bend. Higher judiciary was willing to decree that under the Emergency regime, citizens did not even have the ‘right to life’. Politicians of all hue and colour, barring honourable exceptions, lay supine and prostrate. There was gloom all around and it looked as if everything was over and the world's largest democracy was slowly but surely drifting into dictatorship.

But through this all, one single soul, one lonely spirit continued to stir in anguish and agony, for the first few months in captivity at Chandigarh, later attached to a dialysis machine at Bombay's Jaslok Hospital, and then in a spartan house in Patna. Yet, this defiant, indomitable spirit in the person of Jayaprakash Narayan dared the might of Indira's dictatorship and defeated it, thereby restoring

freedom and democracy to India. This he did despite being in the frailest of health and living on borrowed time.

All nations, most of all India, need an icon to which they can cleave when times are bad, which can unite them across barriers of caste, creed, clan and language. The mid-seventies were bad days and through the draconian and repressive regime of National Emergency and the ‘era of discipline’ positioned against ‘anarchy and chaos’, Mrs. Gandhi was building herself up as that icon.

If she had succeeded, she would have got a clear mandate in any ensuing election, since majority would have voted for her instead of opting for a vacuum. When firmly in saddle, with Emergency endorsed by the people, the ‘iconship’ would have passed on to Sanjay Gandhi who was waiting in the wings. With age in his favour and his known dislike for the democratic process, India would have drifted from ‘direct democracy’ to ‘directed democracy’, a euphemism for dictatorship. An alternative icon was needed to prevent this tragedy from happening and JP with his towering personality and his aura as the hero of ‘Quit India Movement’ eminently filled the bill.

JP's emergence as an alternate icon to take the nation back to freedom and democracy was not an easy task. The Sarvodaya leader was out of circulation and public view for several years before he surfaced in 1974 to lead an uprising, which mostly involved the youth. Mainly students spearheaded this uprising, popularly known as the “JP Movement”. Outlining its *raison d'etre*, JP wrote:

“The movement was started

with certain specific demands. The chief among them were: removal of corruption, curb on inflation, solving the problem of unemployment, and basic changes in the system of education.”

Emphasising on the movement’s main thrust, JP said, “We have always raised our voice against corruption. Prevention of corruption was the main aim of our movement.” These were indeed genuine and unassailable demands and should have received positive response from any government run on democratic principles. Instead, a power drunk ruling coterie chose to respond brutally with harsh repressive measures resulting in the strengthening and spreading of the JP movement.

The Allahabad High Court judgement of June 12, 1975 unseating Mrs. Gandhi from Parliament for ‘corrupt practices’ gave a big fillip to the movement, which was poised to sweep the country. But before it could gain momentum, Mrs. Gandhi struck and in one swift move declared Emergency and incarcerated all leaders who commanded public following.

On top of the list was ‘enemy-number-one-of-the-state’ Jayaprakash Narayan. By this time, JP had come to symbolise the conscience of the nation and uncompromising opposition to corruption and despotism which had become the hallmarks of Congress party and governments. By locking up an ailing JP in confinement, the ruling coterie thought they could break his body and spirit and thereby eliminate the only hurdle they had in enjoying uninterrupted and unfettered power.

What ‘man proposes God disposes’. In this case it was a

woman proposing to be the icon of 750 million people and the unquestioned leader of the vast subcontinent of India for years to come and then pass it on to her progeny. Using the Emergency as a whip to ‘discipline the nation’ and building her up as “Indira is India”, she would have eminently succeeded with individuals and institutions collapsing one by one and falling by the wayside. Barring sporadic murmurs of dissent, she had no opposition whatsoever and all roads were clear as far as eyes could see. But God has his own way of disposing.

During the initial days of the Emergency, within the confines of the yet to be commissioned intensive care ward of Chandigarh’s Post Graduate Institute of Medical

Education and Research (PGI), JP was a haggard and ‘defeated’ individual who felt that all hopes were gone and freedom in India stood extinguished. He had also mentally reconciled himself to die in confinement ‘as a prisoner of Indira Gandhi’. But the Almighty and the Ultimate Arbiter had other ideas. He wanted this man, who once symbolised all that was fiery in India’s freedom struggle and all that was noble in pursuing a cause, to resurge, rise again and re-emerge as the nation’s hope and the alternate icon to lead the people back to freedom and democracy. As the then District Collector & Magistrate of Chandigarh and custodian of JP-in-Jail, I had the privilege of witnessing this history-in-the-making first hand.

Under the Yoke of Neo-Imperialism: A Fake War of Patriotism and Treason

Prem Singh

Civil life in India, especially during the last two decades, has been afflicted by the twin war cry of patriotism (*rashtrabhakti*) and treason (*rashtradroh*). The four pillars of the Indian democracy—the legislative, the executive, the judiciary and the press—as well as the education and research institutions as well as independent and committed intellectuals of the civil society and activists working in different fields / peoples' movements have been actively participating in this war of words. Even the country's defense establishment is these days seen voicing its opinion on this subject. There is no reason to believe that the lower and lower-middle stratas of the society have not been

affected by this phenomena.

This war has picked up speed since the present government came to power. The reasons are obvious. The idea of patriotism and treason are closely linked with the idea of nationalism. Nationalism, on its part, is associated with capitalism. Aggressive capitalism, in order to flourish, needs aggressive nationalism. Exploiting the national identity and spirit of people, this aggressive nationalism is being used as a cover to hide the capitalist loot of national resources. In this process, a fake enemy is constructed before the people and given the label of traitor. People forget about the real enemy of the nation, which in the present era is corporate capitalism, and

start fighting against that imagined enemy. The emergence of aggressive nationalism in India and many other countries in the world is a manifestation of this very aggressive capitalism, in one or the other form.

The ongoing false war between patriotism and treason in India does not have at its core a well-thought-out and serious ideological content concerning the nation. There is no need to give extensive details of the various ideological–strategic contexts and dimensions of this war to prove its truth. The way the roles, characters, thoughts, narratives, issues, symbols, goals, strategies etc. change every moment make self-evident the futility as well as craftiness of the war of patriotism and treason. The absurd and ridiculous nature of this war becomes clear by looking at just three episodes related to it. One, the attempt to keep a military tank in the campus of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in the name of inculcating patriotism in the students and teachers; two, the binding of a citizen to the bonnet of a military jeep by an army officer in Kashmir while confronting the protesters; and three, the bizarre diktat given to the Muslim pilgrims from India going to Mecca to perform Haj to display the national flag.

The concept of nation, in modern India, is essentially linked to anti-colonialism. If any narrative of the nation does not address today's neo-imperialism, then it is clearly fake. This is not to say that politics alone exists in the center of national life; but politics is important. Politics can be real, but can also be fake. When fake politics prevails collectively and with pomp and show, everything goes fake in national life. This has been happening in India for the last nearly three decades. The arguments propagated by those who face the

allegations of treason, those who claim to be the true defenders of the Indian Nation, are often as shallow as those who believe in the *Hindu Rashtra theory* (and who are always ready to provide the certificate of patriotism to themselves).

A recent example would be quite adequate to explain the point. There was a considerable debate about the former President, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, agreeing to deliver a speech at the headquarters of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). When his speech was over, those who opposed him for accepting the invitation immediately changed their tune and began to build a monument of praise upon him. They explained that Shri Mukherjee had taught a good lesson on the idea of the Indian Nation to the RSS, right at its headquarters.

The important question, as to why has the concept of *Hindu Rashtra* become so dominant today, despite the presence of the far more meaningful idea of the Indian Nation and the large number of its intellectual supporters, was not even touched while eulogising Shri Mukherjee's speech. The idea of a fanatic *Hindu Rashtra* has been present in the country for the last 80 years. Notwithstanding the presence and influence of the supporters / adherents of the Indian Nation in all the academic, educational, literary, artistic and cultural institutions and big NGOs of the country, one needs to seriously ask as to why have the educated and well-off Indians, in India and abroad, along with the ordinary masses, come to support the Hindu-fascist mindset today?

To a large extent, the defenders of the Indian Nation are themselves responsible for this situation. However, they do not want admit this. Admitting their mistakes will require introspection and maybe

some self-criticism. But that can take place only when one does not consider oneself beyond criticism. However, the Marxist, modernist and libertarian defenders of the Indian Nation are simply not ready for this kind of discussion that would call for owning up responsibility. They only want to make strategic use of the idea of Indian Nation in order to oppose the *Hindu Rashtra* of the RSS. Their strategy is to portray the RSS as the sole enemy. Ironically, this applies to the RSS as well because it too wants to pursue the strategy of limiting the debate to around this issue.

The idea of the modern Indian nation had been discussed and nurtured from the time of colonial domination to the time of independence. This idea, with its strengths and weaknesses, is still being discussed and continues to take shape. Unfortunately, many Marxists, modernists, libertarians and even liberals do not want to come clear about their faith in it. They seem to be more interested in intellectual manoeuvres so that the debate remains focussed only on nationalism, so as to allow the conflict between the defenders of the Indian Nation and the advocates of the Hindu Rashtra to drag on. Most of these English-language bred intellectual elites are not ready to understand that the toiling masses of India have paid a heavy price for such intellectual manoeuvres, and these masses have now become victims of a variety of misconceptions.

In the context of Shri Mukherjee's speech, the defenders of the Indian Nation did not make the remotest effort to raise the pertinent question that every camp seems to be joyfully accepting the yoke of neo-imperialism. The opponents of RSS may oppose fascism and plead for democracy. But the RSS knows that

the BJP government will not always be there. It therefore has no problems with inviting any defender of the Indian Nation to its headquarters, provided it has gathered adequate political strength. This is not an appropriation. This, to say the least, is a unity of two fake groups working in favor of neo-imperialism. The collaboration between the two has been strengthened since 1991, the year when the New Economic Policies were imposed.

* * *

It is not without reason. Both these ideas of nationalism are unrealistic in the context of modern India. The 'Golden Age', fetishised by the supporters of *Hindu Rashtra*, is located in a distant time and age. The one created by communists, modernists and libertarians is situated somewhere in a remote 'place', which keeps changing according to their convenience. Not surprisingly, the journey of these two unrealistic ideas of the Indian nation essentially culminates at the doorsteps of corporate capitalism. As a result, *Manuvad* is tagged on to the *Hindu Rashtra*, while, on the other hand, the defenders of Indian Nation tag on to a bizarre mix of many isms while aspiring to build a 'digital India'. In the process of struggle and dialogue with colonialism, the historic enterprise of redefining, reinterpreting and reorganising the spirit of Indianness (*bharatiyata*) in the midst of global developments has almost come to a dead end. The stagnant idea of 'nation' often turns into a mentality, which can be simultaneously violent, conspiratorial and cowardly.

As capitalist oppression intensifies, people ultimately rise to resist it. To dilute their struggle, capitalist regimes have created a network of NGOs. But there is no end to the devastation being wrought

on the people of India by capitalism. People cannot be cloistered for long by putting NGO fences. Sooner or later, their anger is bound to erupt—if they do not come together as citizens in a political battle against capitalism, their anger will erupt in the name of religion, caste, region and language. All conflicts between the defenders of Indian Nation and believers in the *Hindu Rashtra* aim at channelising this anger of the people in their favor. They do not want to leave a middle path. It is not surprising that India is turning into a 'mob-nation'.

It is a matter of concern that the civil society activists who are defenders of the Indian-Nation call upon caste / religious communities (Dalits, Muslims, tribals, OBCs etc.) to come together on one platform against the fascist attack of the RSS–BJP. These intellectual defenders of the Indian Nation think that all wisdom / knowledge is their sole property. The strategy of the RSS since its inception has been to mobilise communities along identity lines and that makes the RSS the biggest hurdle in the path of creating in the people the modern sense of citizenship. Have the civil society activist defenders of the Indian Nation also decided that the *Hindu Rashtra* of the RSS is not contrary to the idea of a citizen-nation? There was a time when, during the early years after the imposition of the New Economic Policies in 1991, serious efforts were being made to create an alternative politics by bringing together various issue-based resistance movements of different areas in order to defeat the neo-imperialist attack. Now we are witnessing calls given by those ensconced in the lap of corporate politics to various communities to unite in the name of Indian Nation!

At one time it was believed that

the caste-equation (OBCs–Dalits–Muslims) politics is an antidote to communalism in elections. It was cloaked in nomenclatures like 'politics of social justice'. However, the RSS went ahead and turned that idea to its own advantage, because the defenders of the Indian Nation did not place the politics of social justice on the constitutional–ideological axis of socialism, secularism and democracy. 'Social justice' politics became confined merely to 'social engineering' with the sole aim of winning elections. The rest of the 'task' was completed by the casteist–dynastic leaders!

There is no need to explain that the worst kind of misery in this 'mob-nation' is being faced by Muslims. The majority of the Muslim society, being isolated from the process of politicisation, is bound to become a lackey of this or that caste-equation under this or that political party/leader. There is no place for them in the Hindu Rashtra, at least with equal status. Unfortunately, even in the Indian Nation, they do not have an equal status as Indian citizens. They are treated even by their so-called saviours with a scornful charity mentality. Such behavior is accepted as secular and comes in handy to encash for posts, awards and grants from willing regimes.

* * *

All narratives of the Indian Nation are together in their opposition to Gandhi. They sometimes beat Gandhi with the stick of Bhagat Singh, sometimes with that of Ambedkar, sometimes with the whip of Subhash Chandra Bose, sometimes under the pretext of Jawaharlal Nehru and sometimes even with Jinnah. But as soon as they confront the RSS, they all start to rail against the organization for its role in the assassination of Gandhi. While doing so, they do not mean

the Gandhi who blasted the evil face of capitalist industrial civilization even when it was at the heights of its popularity worldwide, nor the Gandhi who gave a new meaning to politics and a new mode of protest against injustice / suppression in a violence-ridden world. Both the defenders of the Indian Nation and the supporters of *Hindu Rashtra* are unanimous in their support for corporate capitalism and thus deny Gandhi's political philosophy and vision. The *Hindu Rashtra* supporters openly oppose the tag of 'Father of the Nation' for Gandhi. Even if the defenders of the India Nation do not declare it openly, the tag of 'Father of the Nation' for Gandhi is not acceptable to them too. The latter should actually immediately release Gandhi from the shackles of 'Father of the Nation'. There will be no problem in building a consensus in the country on this subject. The Hindutva-minded people, who still derive vicarious pleasure, however unexpressed, in the killing of Gandhi will readily accept the idea of removing Gandhi from that position.

Gandhi had successfully linked the collective consciousness of the vast Indian society, which had been divided into varna-caste for centuries and was weakened by imperialist loot, with the anti-imperialist spirit. Gandhi went further and forced the then various intellectual streams to unite with the anti-imperialist spirit of the people. Gandhi's unique contribution to the modern Indian nation was that in this venture he did not have the sentiment of hostility towards the imperialist British rulers, and also tried to prepare fellow Indians for the sentiment of antipathy-less opposition. From Martin Luther King Jr. to Nelson Mandela, many activists the world over have been

thankful to Gandhi for this teaching. However, in India, the country's intellectuals hate Gandhi. There is no such example in the world where a person who devoted his life to the freedom struggle and did not want or take anything in exchange for his role in freeing the country from the colonial yoke, got boundless hatred and disregard from that country's intellectuals.

* * *

It is not surprising that almost all the defenders of the Indian Nation do not even talk about any political alternative despite the intensity of the crisis posed by the corporate-communal nexus. Rather, they have successfully destroyed all the possibilities of an alternative politics built up after 1991 by building complete solidarity with the anti-corruption movement of India Against Corruption (ICA) and the resulting party of that movement. It may be noted that *Bharat Mata* and Tricolor were made brand-equipment of patriotism in the public domain by the mentors of the anti-corruption movement and the subsequent Aam Aadmi Party. Intellectuals used to enjoy a huge reputation and praise in India from the very beginning. It is ironic that despite the worsening crisis before the nation, these very intellectuals today do not show any inclination for chalking out a new path of resistance.

When the Congress introduced the New Economic Policies in 1991, Atal Bihari Vajpayee had said that now the Congress has adopted their ideology and work. The corporate friendly decisions of both the BJP-led coalition governments that have come to power at the Centre, first under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 1999, and now the present one under Narendra Modi, have thoroughly exposed the reality

of the RSS. All of its 'cultural' and 'nationalist' pomposity was only meant to grab and capture the left-overs of capitalist markets. The RSS's 'Hindu Lion' Mohan Bhagwat, who roared in Chicago recently, did not even raise a whimper on the government's decision of allowing 100 percent Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the defense sector. The small and medium traders have given their physical, mental and material resources to the Jana Sangh and now the BJP from the very time of the establishment of these political parties by the RSS. However, as soon as RSS became a crony of multinationals and corporate houses, it abandoned them, and is now permitting FDI in retail.

There is no discussion among the defenders of the Indian Nation about the phenomenon of neo-imperialism spreading in India and all over the world, of which communal fascism is a by-product. They are not concerned about the loss of our freedom that was earned through huge sacrifices. Their basic concern is only to defeat RSS's fascism. In this exercise, the defenders of the Indian Nation do not hesitate to misguide the whole debate. They take away attention from the neo-imperialist attacks by presenting the debate as fascism versus democracy, Hindutva versus Hinduism, Brahminism versus Dalitism (or *dalitwad*), Brahminism versus Backwardism (*pichhadawad*), etc. Their whole emphasis is on making strategies to fight these conflicts. It is a fact that due to democracy, some deprived castes and communities have got political power. They are struggling to maintain and consolidate their hold on power. They should use democratic means only to advance their struggle, as whatever gains they have made have been because of

democracy. But it is seen that some intellectuals seek to find 'militant' elements in these communities and want to connect them with violent resistance against the Indian state. Is the intention behind this kind of strategy against fascism honest by any stretch of imagination?

* * *

At the time of imposition of the New Economic Policies in 1991, Kishan Patnaik tried to provide and delineate a relevant perspective and direction to the debate on patriotism and treason. He based his thoughts on the experience of two centuries of colonial occupation of India. He linked the beginning of neo-liberalism in India with the beginning of slavery once again, and blamed the intellectuals of India for this. He argued that the minds of Indian intellectuals are unable to work freely against neo-liberalism and neo-imperialism. Kishan Patnaik proposed a formula of 'economic nationalism' (*arthik rashtrawad*) to counter neoliberal economic subjugation. According to him, the real patriots were those who opposed the plunder and loot of the country's resources by domestic and foreign corporate houses, while the traitors were (though he did not say so explicitly) the supporters of neo-liberalism.

To sum up, aggressive capitalism is not only looting our resources and labour, but also hollowing our national spirit (*bodh*). Actually, it would be more appropriate to say that since our national spirit has become hollow, it has enabled the loot of the country's resources and labor. Our national life cannot be enriched if there is no national spirit. In fact, the present aggressive nationalism is a futile exercise to fill the hollowness caused by the enfeebled national spirit. While it is true that the present scenario

appears depressing, and the loot of our wealth and natural resources by corporate houses is going to continue for some time, however, this loot cannot continue indefinitely. Sooner

or later, rejuvenation of the national spirit is bound to take place, and then people will rise and throw away this yoke of neo-imperialism.

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How South Africa's Shack Dwellers' Movement Is Fighting Back

Celina della Croce

In one of few appearances since he was forced to go underground, S'bu Zikode, a founder and leader of the Shack Dwellers Movement of South Africa (Abahlali baseMjondolo), spoke at the People's Forum in New York a few days ago. This is not his first time in hiding—he has faced threats and attempts on his life throughout the years—and many leaders of his movement have been assassinated. In New York, S'bu spoke of the struggle of his people and how they are moving forward in the face of brutal repression. How, in his words, they are not only living but marching forward “in the shadows of death” despite frequent raids, evictions and assassinations. Despite what he faces at home—violence, separation from his family and his community, betrayal by his comrades—S'bu is calm, collected and kind. He walks into the room with the confidence and wisdom of a leader and the humility of a soldier.

The movement that S'bu belongs to, Abahlali baseMjondolo, is among South Africa's largest social movements, with 50,000 members in 40 settlements throughout five of South Africa's nine provinces. The movement started in Durban in 2005 when public lands that had been promised to shack dwellers for public housing development

were instead given to a private developer. Shack dwellers took to the streets to protest, blockading major roads. The uprising “was out of anger, hunger and frustration. It was out of need,” says S'bu. “There weren't any clever individuals that sat around the table and thought of building this movement.” Since 2005, however, the movement has developed structures to strengthen and grow its membership and set a vision that goes far beyond their initial demand for housing.

While South Africa's constitution—a victory of the anti-apartheid movement that elected its first democratic president, Nelson Mandela, in 1994—guarantees the “right to adequate housing,” at least 13.5 percent of South Africans continue to live in shacks in informal settlements without access to basic services such as roads, sanitation and electricity. There is a large gap between the rhetoric around human rights and the reality of people on the ground. Despite claims from the African National Congress (ANC) government, which has been in office since 1994, that the development of public housing “normally takes about 30 days,” many families have been in temporary camps for years. Residents complain of corruption, harassment and bribery if they

attempt to gain access to public housing, the allocation of which currently lies at the discretion of those in power. Residents allege that every election season, government officials appear and paint the shacks with numbers with the promise that houses are coming—if they count the shacks and families, they will know how many houses to deliver. But year after year, houses have not appeared for many of South Africa’s shack dwellers, and the old numbers are crossed out and replaced with new ones as the settlements grow and promises of public housing fade. In the interim, the same government officials surface only to destroy the shacks and force residents from their homes, using the number system to indicate which shacks have appeared between election seasons and are to be torn down. During these raids, the shack dwellers’ homes are destroyed, and some residents have even been killed.

The threat of violence looms over the lives of Abahlali members, many of whom have been killed at protests, during evictions, and in targeted assassinations. S’bu says this is why, when members want to join the movement, they make sure they understand what the risks are: “We tell comrades from the onset when they sign up that you die here. We make sure that people are clear about the terrain that they are entering, that it is not just risky, but we have buried comrades, and we continue to bury comrades.” They know the risks. But what choice do they have? S’bu continues: “Comrades will take that risk, because they do not want to die slowly and surely.” The choice that they face is slow and certain death—to succumb to extreme poverty, violent land invasions, lack of access to proper infrastructure,

health care, and education, constant assaults on their dignity—or to risk dying fighting, in S’bu’s words, “because we have no choice but to live like human beings.”

At the heart of Abahlali’s demands, and a key part of what makes them such a threat to the current system, is something much deeper than the demand for land and dignified housing that attacks the core of the profit-driven capitalist system not only in South Africa, but across the world. S’bu explains that “we are opposed to the idea that land should be bought and sold, and we struggle from below to allocate land on the basis of human needs rather than private profits. We have come up with a principle in Abahlali that the social value of land must come before its commercial value, and our lives as such must come before profits. The land was stolen from the black majority people in South Africa, [and] the majority of land in South Africa is still in the hands of minority white farmers. So, as a way to redress that, then occupation becomes key. Because how do you buy something that belongs to you? That’s the political intervention: to say, we were dispossessed of our land, now it’s the time to slowly, slowly get our land back.” Abahlali threatens to expose the reality of many of the country’s most marginalised voices and question the very value system on which it is based. This is not a demand that can be settled with a mere parcel of land.

Despite the attacks that Abahlali has faced—both from the state and from within the movement—they have remained firm in their demands and have continued to grow. S’bu attributes much of their success to a structure that gives power to the many rather than the few, and to deep organising rather than surface-level

mobilisations. “We try to make a distinction between organising and mobilising,” he explains. “People will tell you, ‘we have 100,000 members.’ But if you ask them just to call a meeting, people don’t show up. Because people happen to sign up a few years ago, you think they are part of you. They’re not following you. That’s why we try to make a distinction between organising and mobilising. If you mobilise people, they will come for that particular day because somehow you have managed to attract them. But you have not organised them because you have not been able to sustain such a gathering of them.” In Abahlali, he says, “our movement belongs to its members. We are committed to building the democratic power of the oppressed from below.”

S’bu stands before a small audience in Manhattan. He is wearing a suit, dark blue and freshly pressed. He has a small frame but the presence of a giant, carrying with him the voices of tens of thousands of shack dwellers. “I have always likened Abahlali to a sea, as waves in the sea which reject any trash you put in it. If you put trash in the sea, the waves will kick it out,” he tells the audience, speaking of the trials that Abahlali is facing. S’bu returned to South Africa shortly after the event. He worries about the risk for his wife and young children. But he believes in the power of Abahlali’s membership. The waves will cleanse the sea. “We have no choice but to live like human beings,” he says.

On Sunday, October 14, after months in hiding, S’bu was welcomed back by his fellow shack dwellers in what marks a return to his public life. The threats have not dissipated. But, S’bu says, “I have taken a decision that I will rather perish than bow to my oppressors.”

Letter to Editor

Ambedkar and Capitalism

Nischay Mhatre

Prof Anand Teltumbde's two-part article, "Babasaheb Ambedkar and Neo-Liberal Economic Reforms" that appeared in the September 30 and October 7 issues of *Janata* were a necessary rebuttal to those who are fraudulently using Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar's name and aura to promote an economic model which he despised. I would like to give here three additional statements by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar in support of that article. In these statements, he explicitly denounces capitalist economy and supports socialist economy.

The first statement was made at an early stage of the Constitution making process. It was when the "Aims and Objectives Resolution" was taken up for debate on the floor of the Assembly on December 13, 1946. Babasaheb made the following remark in his speech:

I do not understand how it could be possible for any future Government which believes in doing justice socially, economically and politically, unless its economy is a socialistic economy.

The second statement is a part of the excellent explanatory notes which he included as an appendix in his Memorandum submitted to the Constituent Assembly in March 1947 and that was later published under the title of *States and Minorities*. One could say that this memorandum reflects the vision of India as Babasaheb saw it on the eve of independence. In the explanation of Article 2, Section 2, Clause 4, titled "Protection Against Violation of Fundamental Rights: Protection Against Economic Exploitation", Babasaheb wrote,

Anyone who studies the working of the system of social economy based on private enterprise and pursuit of personal gain will realize how it undermines, if it does not actually violate, the last two premises on which Democracy rests. How many have to relinquish their constitutional rights in order to gain their living? How many have to subject themselves to be governed by private employers? Ask those who are unemployed whether what are called Fundamental Rights are of any value to them. If a person who is unemployed is offered a choice between a job of some sort, with some sort of wages, with no fixed hours of labour and with an interdict on joining a union and the exercise of his right to freedom of speech, association, religion, etc., can there be any doubt as to what his choice will be. How can it be otherwise? The unemployed are thus compelled to relinquish their Fundamental Rights for the sake of securing the privilege to work and to subsist.

What about those who are employed? Constitutional Lawyers assume that the enactment of Fundamental Rights is enough to safeguard their liberty and that nothing more is called for. They argue that where the State refrains from intervention in private affairs—economic and social—the residue is liberty. What is necessary is to make the residue as large as possible and State intervention as small as possible. It is true that where the State refrains from intervention what remains is liberty. But this does not dispose of the matter. One more question remains to be answered. To whom and for whom is this liberty? Obviously this liberty

is liberty to the landlords to increase rents, for capitalists to increase hours of work and reduce rate of wages. This must be so. It cannot be otherwise . . . In other words what is called liberty from the control of the State is another name for the dictatorship of the private employer.

Such an explicit criticism of capitalism is more than any 'liberal' would dare venture, let alone a 'supporter of neo-liberalism'. It is worth noting that from Ambedkar's perspective, a capitalist economy was an enemy of liberty and social justice. As far as he was concerned, the scheme of 'State Socialism' was by no means a dirigistic scheme to prepare the ground for Indian capitalists. It was necessary for Democracy itself. Thus, one may rightly say that while his struggle was not for 'bread alone', it is clear that he recognised the impossibility of achieving human dignity and liberty without resolving the question of 'bread'.

The need to reach a consensus on the Constitution may have led him to tone down his insistence on using the word 'socialism' explicitly until the Constitution was approved. But in May 1950, just months after the Constitution came into force, he made a telling statement during an informal interview with the famed author Mulk Raj Anand:

Indeed liberty so far seems to be the liberty of the landlord to increase rent. The capitalist always wants to reduce wages and increase hours of work. Capitalism is dictatorship of the private employer."

Can there be stronger words with which one can denounce capitalism?

Scientists Warn Extinction Now Outpaces Evolution

Cheyenne Macdonald

Humans are now driving mammals to extinction at rates much faster than Earth's species may be able to recover from, a new study warns. Even in the best-case scenario, worrying new estimates suggest it will take upwards of 5 million years for mammal species to bounce back to current biodiversity levels following the extinctions expected to occur over the next five decades. The researchers say evolution will not be able to keep up with the rate by which mammal species are dying out unless we ramp up conservation efforts.

While Earth has experienced five mass extinctions in its history, the current phenomenon is unique in that it is caused by humans, not natural disasters.

In the new study, researchers from Aarhus University and the University of Gothenburg used an extensive database of mammals both in existence today and those that have gone extinct since the rise of *Homo sapiens* to assess the future of mammalian biodiversity.

Large mammal species, the researchers warn, are disproportionately at risk of dying out altogether.

"Large mammals, or megafauna, such as giant sloths and saber-toothed tigers, which became extinct about 10,000 years ago, were highly evolutionarily distinct," says palaeontologist Matt Davis from Aarhus University, who led the study. "Since they had few close relatives, their extinctions meant that entire branches of Earth's evolutionary tree were chopped off." Davis says, "There were hundreds of species of shrew, so they can weather a few extinctions. There were only four species of saber-toothed tiger; they all went extinct."

According to the study, it will take mammals 5 to 7 million years

to recover from the biodiversity losses they have incurred since the emergence of modern humans. And, it would take 3 to 5 million years to reach the levels they're at now, even if humans cease destructive practices.

In the next 50 years, we could lose several species, with the black rhino and Asian elephant both feared to be at risk of dying out before the end of the century.

When were Earth's 'BIG Five' Extinction Events?

Traditionally, scientists have referred to 'Big Five' mass extinctions. Of these, perhaps the most famous mass extinction was triggered by a meteorite impact that brought about the end of the dinosaurs 66 million years ago. But the other major mass extinctions were caused by phenomena originating entirely on Earth, and while they are less well known, we may learn something from exploring them that could shed light on our current environmental crises.

1. *The Late Ordovician*: This ancient crisis around 445m years ago saw two major waves of extinction, both caused by climate change associated with the advance and retreat of ice sheets in the southern hemisphere. This makes it the only major extinction to be linked to global cooling.
2. *The Late Devonian*: This period is now regarded as a number of 'pulses' of extinction spread over 20m years, beginning 380m years ago. This extinction has been linked to major climate change, possibly caused by an eruption of the volcanic Viluy Traps area in modern-day Siberia. A major eruption might have caused rapid fluctuations in sea levels and reduced oxygen levels in the oceans.

3. *The Middle Permian*: Scientists have recently discovered another event 262 million years ago that rivals the 'Big Five' in size. This event coincided with the Emeishan eruption in what's now China, and is known to have caused simultaneous extinctions in the tropics and higher latitudes.

4. *The Late Permian*: The Late Permian mass extinction around 252 million years ago dwarfs all the other events, with about 96% of species becoming extinct. The extinction was triggered by a vast eruption of the Siberian Traps, a gigantic and prolonged volcanic event that covered much of modern day Siberia, which led to a cascade of environmental effects.

5. *The Late Triassic*: The Late Triassic event, 201 million years ago, shares a number of similarities with the Late Permian event. It was caused by another large-scale eruption, this time of the Central Atlantic Magmatic Province, which heralded the splitting of the supercontinent Pangaea and the initial opening of what would later become the Atlantic Ocean.

"Although we once lived in a world of giants: giant beavers, giant armadillos, giant deer, etc, we now live in a world that is becoming increasingly impoverished of large wild mammalian species," says Professor Jens-Christian Svenning from Aarhus University, who heads a large research program on megafauna. "The few remaining giants, such as rhinos and elephants, are in danger of being wiped out very rapidly."

We need to identify and prioritise at risk species before it's too late. "It is much easier to save biodiversity now than to re-evolve it later," Davis says.



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Another Assault on Academic Freedom

Apoorvanand

A former professor at the Jawaharlal Nehru University told me that his vice chancellor once called him to speak to him about the regular commentaries he wrote in the newspapers. He thought that the vice chancellor probably did not want him to waste his time writing opinion pieces and instead use it to produce academic work. But what the vice chancellor said next put his unease in perspective. I can get in trouble for what you write, the vice chancellor told him. The professor returned amused, he was not concerned about the security of his job.

Those were gentler times. A vice chancellor asking a faculty member not to make life difficult for him by criticising the government knew that it was embarrassing to discuss this in the open. If the professor decided not to listen to him, he could do little.

Today, vice chancellors have a reason to shut up their teachers. They are being directed by the University Grants Commission to treat teachers as government servants—bar them from speaking their minds which more often than not goes against the power.

The regulator sent the directive to universities in May. But it is making news now after the JNU

administration adopted the directive to make its teaching staff compliant to Civil Services Conduct Rules.

The JNU teaching community is up in arms, fearing the decision will take away their freedom to pursue their work without fear. The administration is accusing the complaining teachers of spreading half-truths. It maintains that the conduct rules will kick in only where the JNU Act or relevant ordinances are silent. But the laws governing universities such as JNU are silent at many places. For one, they do not explicitly state how the faculty should conduct themselves in matters of politics, or public life generally.

Civil servants are not supposed to criticise the government, their employer. This may be understandable even if we now see many civil servants writing or speaking rather freely. Their views can embarrass the government, yet they are being tolerated.

Teachers have enjoyed freedom in this regard. Not only can they air their political views openly, they need not resign to participate in active politics. They can join political formations, organise or lead political campaigns, even fight elections while still in service. The

government has now moved to curb this freedom. The UGC, having forgotten that it must act on behalf of universities and chosen to be the government's post office, has asked universities to frame ordinances to bind teachers to the Civil Services Conduct Rules.

To understand how dangerous this is, look at the Tribal Central University of Amarkantak, which is already implementing the conduct rules. An ordinance issued by the university directs all its employees not to speak, write or publish without prior permission from the authorities. This means no employee will be able to speak critically about the government, the university or the UGC. The rules do allow writing for "purely scientific or academic" purposes but are silent on who will make such a determination. Further, not only are the employees barred from associating with any political party or activity, they are expected to dissuade their family members from doing so as well.

JNU has also resolved to implement the service rules while the Central University of Gujarat and the Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad, have already started framing ordinances.

The government has always held the teaching community to be a nuisance, although many members of the ruling class have been teachers themselves. We have often heard bureaucrats wondering how teachers can be allowed to criticise the government when it pays their salaries.

Feeling under siege

Knowledge, in the true sense of the term, is criticism. It questions authority in all its forms. A teacher's job is not only to facilitate the transfer of available knowledge

to the next generation but also to create new knowledge. How can this be done uncritically? How, for example, would a critique of atomic energy or the building of mega dams be treated by the government? When any word against the Sardar Sarovar Dam is deemed sacrilege in Gujarat, or when atomic energy is seen as being essential to national development, how can a teacher discuss them without risking being treated as anti-government or even anti-national?

In any modern democratic society, the academic community has a function beyond the classroom. They are expected to help the public make informed choices, and not only in elections. How else are citizens expected to assess government policies that affect their lives if specialists are prevented from explaining their import without fear or favour. In recent years, we have seen how intervention by economists like Jean Dreze led to the enactment of the Right to Food Act. And it's constant public intervention by scholars like him that has kept the debate on Aadhaar alive. Scholarship will flee India's public universities if teachers are restrained from speaking their minds.

In any case, it is not the UGC's business to keep bombarding universities with suggestions about internal governance. Universities are autonomous institutions governed by their respective acts. The UGC is meant only to ensure that standards are maintained. Yet, in the last few years, successive governments have used the regulator to dictate to universities and meddle in their internal affairs. And weak leaderships of universities have allowed it without much protest. Forcing the conduct rules on teachers is the latest assault on academic

freedom in India.

In countries such as China, Russia and Turkey, universities are seen with suspicion and, thus, tightly controlled by government. In India, however, campuses have been largely liberal. Academics have been allowed to have their views and no government has dared treat a university teacher as just another of its employees. Until now, that is.

Since the Bharatiya Janata Party took power four years ago, leaders of the ruling party and even ministers have frequently denounced universities as dens of "anti-nationals". Most recently, liberal campuses have been projected as the stomping grounds of "Urban Naxals". The government has unleashed propaganda that anti-national and "anti-development" elements are operating out of universities, masquerading as teachers. For India to achieve peaceful development, the government says, campuses must be weeded out of such undesirable elements. It appears a wide section of the public is receptive to the idea of purging campuses of people who do not confine themselves to jobs they are supposedly being paid for—and the government is now using this popular sentiment to ensure compliant campuses.

This will greatly damage public universities. Already, some eminent scholars have left esteemed institutions such as Delhi University and JNU for private establishments such as the Ashoka University or the Jindal University. It is wrong to assume they were lured by money. A feeling of being under siege robbed them of their peace. Scholarship cannot take place in this atmosphere. It would be really sad if our society left teachers to fight this battle on their own.

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The Indian Economy in a Tailspin

Prabhat Patnaik

The Indian economy is in a tailspin. This cannot be attributed only to innocence in economic matters of the command-centre of the NDA government. While that is indubitably a contributing factor, the current travails of the economy point to something deeper, namely the dead-end to which neo-liberalism has brought the economy. Without moving away from the neo-liberal trajectory, the economy cannot come out of its current difficulties.

India's success in raising the GDP growth rate, the main selling point for the neo-liberal regime, was, unlike China's, built upon the quicksand of a persistent trade and current account deficit on the external front. This was covered all this time by financial inflows, which were large enough even to add to the foreign exchange reserves. A major factor contributing to such inflows in recent years was the much lower interest rates in metropolitan economies, especially in the US where they were virtually pushed down to zero to revive the economy after 2008, compared to India.

But now the US itself has started raising the interest rates; and uncertainty over the future of neo-liberalism in the wake of Trump's protectionist measures is making globalised finance flow massively to the US as its safe "home base". The dollar, for both these reasons, is rising relative to other currencies, especially relative to the rupee. This state of affairs is not going to be reversed in the foreseeable future, which is why the rupee continues to slide vis-à-vis the dollar, even after

Arun Jaitley announced a slew of measures on September 14 to attract finance into the economy to stem the rupee's slide.

The sliding rupee is raising import costs, especially of crude oil; and the latter get passed on in the form of higher petro-product prices. This fact, together with the rise of crude prices in the world market, following an agreement within the OPEC itself, has now raised petrol and diesel prices in India to dizzying heights; and the rise continues daily. Here again there is no question of any respite within the neo-liberal regime from the relentless impact of this exchange-rate-depreciation-cum-inflation syndrome. The only thing Arun Jaitley can think of doing is to attract sufficient financial inflow to stabilise the rupee, but that as suggested above is now more difficult; and even if there is some temporary reprieve through such inflows, it cannot but be temporary.

Manmohan Singh and Chidambaram attack the NDA for its economic incompetence, which is undeniable, but they have hardly any better ideas. At the most they may jack up interest rates a bit more, but that, while its effects on financial inflows would be dubious for reasons already mentioned, would amount at best to merely papering over the cracks (since the basic problem of the current account deficit would still remain unaddressed); besides it will worsen unemployment, and damage further the economy of the small producers.

One way of providing relief to the people against the skyrocketing

petrol and diesel prices, whose effects are felt even by the poorest persons because they increase the transport costs of all goods, is to lower the taxes on these goods which make up the bulk of their prices. Some state governments, of whom Kerala was an early example and Karnataka the latest, have indeed reduced their taxes on petro-products to provide relief to the people. But there are limits to the extent to which such relief would be forthcoming, for two obvious reasons, both related to the neo-liberal regime.

One is our overwhelming reliance on indirect taxation, and the eschewing of direct taxation, because of the compulsion to retain so-called "investors' confidence", so that finance flows in adequate quantities to keep the balance of payments on an even keel. The second is the disastrous move towards a Goods and Services Tax, again in conformity with the demands of a neo-liberal economy, which has affected government tax revenues adversely.

In the face of this already adverse effect, the need to maintain government revenues becomes even more pressing, and puts a limit to the degree to which taxes on petro-products can be lowered (unless greater direct taxation is resorted to). Indeed the only reason that some states have been able to reduce taxes, for lowering petrol and diesel prices, is because these goods fall outside the GST ambit; but naturally they cannot keep doing so beyond a point without raising revenue in other ways. (And such ways are no longer

available to state governments even to the limited extent they were earlier).

The way out of the current economic predicament however is obvious, though invisible to eyes blinkered by neo-liberalism. Since the inflow of finance will no longer cover the current account deficit, the slide in the rupee would require controlling this deficit; and this can be effected only by directly controlling inessential imports. Even in 2013 when the rupee was sliding, the government had controlled gold imports as a means of stemming this slide. Wealth-holders then were moving from rupees to gold. This had boosted gold imports, and direct controls over such imports played a significant role in reducing the trade deficit and halting the rupee's slide. The ambit of import controls now will of course have to be wider, but there is no escape from such controls. The rupee will have to be stabilised immediately with a combination of import controls and use of foreign exchange reserves.

But this may not be enough to stabilise petro-product prices in view of world market trends. These prices will have to be not just stabilised, but actually lowered to prevent down-the-line cost-push inflationary effects on commodities in general. This can be done by significantly lowering taxes upon them, and making up for the revenue shortfall caused by such lowering through larger direct taxation, in particular wealth taxation.

Wealth taxation in any case is the best way to finance public expenditure as it has no adverse effects upon any investment "incentives": since all forms of wealth are taxed without discrimination, there is no special disincentive for holding wealth in

the form of productive assets. In addition it has the effect of keeping wealth inequality in society in check, which, as is commonly accepted now, is an essential prerequisite for democracy.

It is shocking that in India, where wealth inequalities have been rising so sharply of late, there is hardly any wealth taxation. Using direct taxation on wealth as a substitute for indirect taxation on petro-products will thus kill several birds with one stone: it will prevent the inflationary squeeze on the people that rising petro-product price are imposing, and at the same time bring greater wealth equality in society which is desirable per se.

Lower petro-product prices, it may be argued, would encourage larger consumption of such products, which, in the current context of rising world crude prices, would raise the country's import-bill, bringing pressure on the rupee once again. Alongside controlling, and lowering petro-product prices therefore, the government has to take steps to control petro-product consumption directly. Since much of this consumption occurs within the government itself, with the defence sector in particular being a major consumer, controlling consumption can be effected through a set of directives within the government. As for consumption outside the government sector, several measures can be taken which effectively ration the use of petro-products.

Many of these measures are advocated and even implemented on environmental grounds. The "odd-even" scheme for instance that was implemented in Delhi was also a means of petro-product rationing. In many countries, to avoid congestion in peak hours, a

minimum number of occupants per car is insisted upon; this also acts as a measure of directly controlling petro-product consumption. In other words, measures of petro-product rationing would also kill several birds with one stone: they would reduce road congestion; they would reduce environmental pollution; and they would also reduce the consumption of petro-products with beneficial effects for our balance of payments.

A combination of direct import controls on inessential items, reduction of petro-product prices, measures for reducing the consumption of such products and direct taxation, especially on wealth, is the obvious way of getting out of the tailspin in which the Indian economy is currently caught. But this combination of measures which is desirable, not just for getting out of the current travails, but on other, more long-term considerations as well, runs contrary to the direction of neo-liberalism. There is however no alternative to them if we are to avoid the fate of countries that eventually run to the IMF and get caught in the vice-like grip of "austerity".

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Is India Heading Towards Militarism?

Anil Sinha

It was unusual for a country like India to accept the fact that it invaded a territory of the neighbouring country. But Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP president Amit Shah are not tired of mentioning the valour of a strike across the Line of Control on the Kashmir border. The strike which they claimed to be surgical one became the focus of a month-long celebration two years later in September 2018. The celebration of the 'Surgical Strike' made on a Pakistani post on September 29, 2018 was not only a show of military strength of India, but also an affirmation to a newly acquired faith. Indian polity has made a turn towards militarism, in a clear departure from the policy the country had adopted even before it became independent. Another dark side of the story is the ruling party's attempt to make it an electoral plank in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

There is any hardly need to emphasise that the much hyped surgical strike could not achieve its objective to check cross border terrorism. The celebrations to commemorate the operation two years later had nothing except the intent to mobilise people around an idea which goes against the democratic interest of the country and the sub-continent. A dramatised version of the story ran across the screens of TV channels. Statistics do not favour the claim of the government that terrorist attacks in Kashmir have come under control. An objective analysis only reveals that the operation only achieved distrust and bad name for

the country. Former minister and eminent journalist Arun Shouri has given an account of the surgical strike carried out by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government. If we go by his claims, the earlier strike during Vajpayee's time seems to be much bigger than one under the Modi government.

The deterioration in the Kashmir situation is all too visible. Life is more difficult than before. Terrorists have been frequently striking civil and military establishments. Pakistan has also shown not any sign of timidity, as we were made to believe soon after the exercise. Then, what is the rationale behind celebrating a strike? Is it not irresponsible on the part of a democratic country like India to glamourise a military operation? It has an adverse effect on regional peace. A country like India is known for its efforts towards promoting peace. It is really a matter of concern that we are ignoring the role we are known for. The Modi government must be held responsible for abandoning the ethos of our traditional foreign policy. The government is carrying forward a creed which has been proved a failure during the World Wars.

Militarism has inspired some more acts of the BJP government. The induction of General V.K. Singh into the party and later into the ministry despite his being a general with a controversial background is another example of BJP's inclination towards militarism.

In its four years of focused campaign in favor of the army and endorsement of every single act of the army, the BJP has always been

trying to promote the concept of a polity which gives the military an important role. The climax of the campaign can be seen in Amit Shah launching his 'Sampark for Samarthan' campaign with a visit to the residence of ex-Army chief General Dalbir Singh Suhag. Obviously, the visit has given rise to speculations that General Suhag may contest the coming Lok Sabha elections.

The BJP, an avatar of Bhartiya Jan Sangh, was in the forefront of the anti-emergency movement and used the movement for an image makeover. Obviously, it is relevant to compare its attempt to change the idioms of democracy with the authoritarian moves taken by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. She had a bigger opportunity of dealing with army generals. Indira Gandhi took over from Lal Bahadur Shastri immediately after the 1965 war was over. She had generals like General J.N. Chaudhary and Lieutenant General Harbaksh Singh to deal with. Both of them had led a decisive win over Pakistan and were household names by the end of the war. Chaudhary did not show any inclination to politics, nor did Mrs. Gandhi encourage him to do so. He went to Canada as India's High Commissioner.

Lieutenant General Harbaksh Singh had led Indian soldiers to victory on the western sector, but he did not even become the Chief of the Army. However, both the generals were recognised for their distinguished services and given the highest civilian honour, the Padma Vibhushan.

The classic case is of Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora. He was General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Eastern Command when the Bangladesh war was fought in 1971. He led the Indian soldiers to victory and forced 90 thousand Pakistani soldiers to surrender. However, Indira Gandhi did not encourage him to join politics. He later became an MP with the help of Akali Dal. He also received the Padma Bhushan.

BJP's inclination cannot be dismissed as an act of opportunism. This is a case of political faith. If we look at the ideological background of the BJP, it is not surprising to see it attempting this. The RSS, the parent organisation of the party, has been a supporter of militarism since its inception. The organisation has been advocating military training for every able bodied individual and wants it to be a part of the curriculum in schools and college. The final training given to an RSS cadet has in fact been given the name Officers' Training Course.

The attempt is obviously bringing some uncommon trends into country's polity. Serving generals are issuing political statements. They are not hesitating in commenting on issues which are purely political. General Bipin Rawat speaks on foreign affairs and asserts that Nepal and Bhutan have no option except to incline towards India.

The latest example of pro-government comments by senior military officers is that of Air Chief Marshal B.S. Dhanoa. He said that in making the Rafale deal, the Indian Air Force was consulted at the appropriate level. It was decided to buy two squadrons through a 'government to government deal' to meet the emergency requirements of the Indian Air Force. "When it

comes to the subcontinent, it will be a game changer, and we have lots of advantages in the Rafale deal," he asserted, at a time when the controversy regarding the Rafale deal is being talked about in the French media as well.

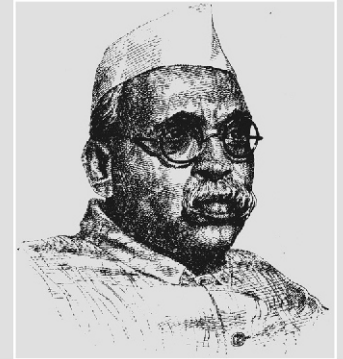
He does not stop here and goes on to criticise the HAL. He accused the public sector company of delaying deliveries, "there is a three year delay in the delivery of Sukhoi-30, a six year delay in the Jaguar, a five year delay in the LCA, and a two year delay in delivery of Mirage 2000 upgrade."

The negotiation for the 126 aircraft deal for the Rafale had reached an impasse. Speaking like a spokesperson of the government, he stated, "The option before us was to keep waiting, or issue a fresh RFP and waste more years, or go in for an emergency purchase. The government took a bold decision."

The Air Chief's defense of the government only confirms that militarism has made its way into the polity. However, the Opposition does not seem to have realised the danger militarism is going to pose to Indian democracy. It seems to have no concern for it. How can we forget that militarism led to two World Wars? How can we forget the catastrophe it has brought to human civilisation? We have also seen that any country chooses militarism to its own peril. People lose democratic rights in the name of nationalism. Hitler and Mussolini are the best examples. Contemporary examples can also open our eyes. In both Myanmar and Pakistan, the army has captured everything from economy to culture. All attempts of restoring democracy in these countries have failed so far. Do we want to go the same way?

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Jayaprakash Narayan: An Idealist Betrayed – Part II

M. G. Devasahayam

What a marvelous experience!

When I received ‘prisoner JP’ at the tarmac of Chandigarh Air Force base on the night of July 1, 1975, Emergency was only a few days old. JP had been taken into custody by the District Magistrate, Delhi on 25/26 June night, moved around nearby areas of Haryana and Delhi’s All-India Institute of Medical Sciences, and was being brought to Chandigarh for safe custody and medical care. To me at that time, JP was an enigma as well as a mystery. My memory of him as the ‘Quit India Movement’ hero of the forties was hazy and the perception of his recent campaign for ‘total revolution’ was rather confusing.

During the 22 weeks JP was in my custody, I did come to know him very intimately. And having understood the nobility of his struggle and the intensity of his commitment, I partook in all matters concerning him and the State, shared his intimate thoughts and feelings, discussed political events and happenings, played ‘Devil’s Advocate’, participated in brainstorming and strategy sessions, took charge of his mental and psychological well-being, initiated the reconciliation process between him and the Prime Minister, and succeeded in reviving his faith in himself and his people which he was on the verge of losing.

“My world lies in shambles all around me. I am afraid I shall not see it put together again in my lifetime. May be my nephews and nieces will see that. May be.”

These opening words of *JP’s Prison Diary—1975* dated 21 July—a full three weeks after his arrival in Chandigarh—amply describe a sense of defeatism and extremely fragile state of JP’s mind and spirit during the initial days. Then he started taking stock of things and did some hard soul searching, introspection and evaluation of events leading to the imposition of Emergency and its aftermath. This intense ‘solo-brainstorming’ led JP to believe that the ‘intellectuals’ who had egged him on saying ‘JP you are the only hope of the nation’ and whom he counted upon as bulwarks of democracy had buckled and had deserted him.

This deep mental hurt was the main cause for some disturbing developments later, including his conclusion that at least for the foreseeable future, democracy in the country was dead. And even if “it was put together after a long time” he will not be there to see it. So, over a period of several days, he drafted a “letter of farewell” to Mrs. Indira Gandhi pouring out his heart in anguish, pleading with her to mend ways and “reconciling to die a prisoner under her regime”. This letter—indeed an epistle—sent on July 21, 1975 to the Prime Minister caused quite a ripple in the corridors of power.

A couple of weeks later on Sunday, August 10, 1975, I had permitted JP’s brother-in-law S.N. Prasad an interview for one hour. Around noon, the Jail Superintendent delivered to me a letter from JP addressed to the Prime Minister

conveying his decision “to go on fast until death” unless the Emergency was revoked and all prisoners released within two weeks. JP had authorised Prasad to announce this to the outside world. Considering the grave implications this could bring forth, I took upon myself the task of dissuading JP from this disastrous move, but did not make any headway even after two hours of highly surcharged nail-splitting verbal duel. JP refused to relent and said that his decision was irrevocable because in his opinion Mrs. Gandhi will only bring more destructive measures now that ‘intellectuals’ had totally buckled and there was no resistance whatsoever. I contested it vehemently and eventually succeeded in persuading JP to give up the idea of fast.

Sensing the distress of JP, I initiated the process of political dialogue and reconciliation, which I had been thinking about for some time. I got working on this, quietly putting this thought in the mind of JP, and increasingly getting a positive response. My efforts culminated in a warm gesture by way of a letter from JP to the PM on September 17 expressing hope of an early end to the Emergency. In response to this, at the behest of Mrs. Gandhi, Sheikh Abdullah issued a positive statement setting the ball rolling on reconciliation.

JP responded to Sheikh Abdullah through a letter which inter alia said:

However, in spite of all that has happened and is happening, I am prepared to seek the path of conciliation. I shall, therefore, be

much obliged if you kindly see me as soon as possible so that I could discuss this matter with you. I being the villain of the piece, the arch-conspirator, culprit number one, a return to true normalcy, not the false one established by repression and terror, can only be brought about with my co-operation. I am herewith offering you my full co-operation.

This letter was delivered at Delhi on September 24 forenoon and the response from PM's Office, particularly P.N. Dhar, Principal Secretary to PM, was swift. A special emissary (Sugatha Das Gupta, Director, Gandhi Institute of Studies, Varanasi, of which JP was the Chairman) arrived on the 25th morning to initiate efforts for a political dialogue between the PM and JP. There were some more visits by Das Gupta and the preliminary work on reconciliation was going apace.

As hope for the success of reconciliation efforts and restoration of democracy was rising, certain mysterious and intriguing things happened culminating in the whole process being sabotaged by Sanjay Gandhi and his cronies. JP's letter to Sheikh Abdullah was never delivered but was returned through Das Gupta during one of his visits. Certain other disturbing events followed.

Mysteriously, in early November 1975, JP's health started deteriorating fast and from the doctor's hedgy replies about his health, I suspected that something was amiss. As later events proved, JP's kidney was getting irrevocably damaged! Under the circumstances, I was convinced that it would be unsafe to keep JP in Chandigarh any longer and he should get to a place where his ailment could be diagnosed correctly

and treated properly.

This conviction led me to initiate silent and swift steps to launch a multi-pronged assault through PMO emissary Das Gupta, JP's brother Rajeshwar Prasad, Chandigarh Chief Commissioner/Union Home Secretary and my personal channel to the PMO with the same message content—"If JP dies in Jail"—to create a crisis mindset in Delhi so that JP could be released immediately.

This worked admirably resulting in a flurry of activities leading to JP's release on 'unconditional parole' on November 12, by an order served on him by the Chief Secretary and District Magistrate of Delhi who flew into Chandigarh by a special BSF aircraft. This was followed by high intensity drama in the next few days when the panicked 'Delhi Durbar' made desperate efforts to retain JP in Chandigarh. However, I prevailed upon the PGI to discharge JP and commandeered seats in the Indian Airlines flight to take JP to Delhi en route to Bombay Jaslok Hospital!

As he departed from Chandigarh on November 16, I saw him off at the airport wishing him well and requesting him to look after his health. JP's reply still rings in my ears: "Devasahayam, you are like a son I never had. My health is not important. The health of the nation and democracy is. I will defeat 'that woman' and have them restored." And then the aircraft departed.

I came back home feeling completely drained but relieved. The last words of JP showed that the fire was back in him and the transition of the 'Lok Nayak' from a defeated individual to a defiant icon was complete. I was confident that with this new spirit he would fulfill his pledge of returning India to freedom

and democracy.

Fourteen months later, emboldened by the reports of 'success' of the Emergency regime and the perception that opposition to her rule was crumbling and JP, the only mass all-India leader was sick and demoralised, Indira Gandhi called for the Sixth General Election to Parliament in January 1977. And in his inimitable style, JP went into action despite being tied down to a dialysis machine twice a week. Without wasting any time, he put into effect the political blueprint he had worked out while in detention and refined later and put together a "Janata Parivar" with one flag and one symbol.

Due largely to his untiring efforts, immediately after coming out of jails, the opposition leaders announced the coming together of Congress (O), Jan Sangh, Bharatiya Lok Dal and Socialists under the Janata Party umbrella. Congress was dealt a body-blow by the sudden defection of Jagjivan Ram, H.N. Bahuguna and Nandini Sathpathy who formed the Congress for Democracy and, along with the DMK in Tamil Nadu and the Akali Dal in Punjab, forged a common front with the Janata Party in order to give a straight fight to the Congress and its allies in the election held in March 1977.

The Emergency and its excesses were the major issues of the election campaign. JP created a public upsurge by touring the country intensively and addressing mammoth gatherings. At several places where he could not go, large crowds intently listened to JP's speech through pre-recorded tapes. His message was simple and straight—if you want autocracy and corruption, vote Congress; if you

want democracy and honesty, vote Janata.

With the popular upsurge thus created, the Janata Parivar captured 345 parliamentary seats with the Congress and its allies far behind with 189. The Congress was virtually wiped out in North India with the party winning only two out of 234 constituencies in seven states. Both Indira Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi were defeated. Indeed, JP lived up to his promise of redeeming India's freedom and I was happy that I had a small part to play.

Why JP brought RSS into the Janata Parivar

While under detention in Chandigarh, JP was making his own plans for elections as and when they took place and the ways and means to remove the Congress from power. He was of the firm conviction that unless a viable and working political alternative to the Congress emerged and sustained, the ruling party would continue to revel in the 'There is no alternative' (TINA) syndrome and an Emergency kind of situation would get repeated. JP planned to devote whatever life was left in him to accomplish this mission of uniting the Opposition.

This was the main subject of discussion when JP and I met frequently in the month of October 1975. During our interaction, JP used to analyse the chances of the Opposition winning in the event of elections as per schedule in February/March 1976. As of now, they were a divided house, he said. Would the trials and tribulations of the Emergency unite them, he wondered. Would a single, viable Opposition be formed? Once elections were announced and he was released, he would go all out

and do his best to defeat Indira at the hustings, he said. He hoped the people wouldn't be fooled again. "This lady must be defeated. She has ruined the country enough," JP used to fume.

I played the devil's advocate. Was she not the hope of the minority—both linguistic and religious—and their champion? I also pointed out that minorities were the majority in this country. Would it not be very difficult to defeat her at the polls, I queried. The Jan Sangh had a communal image and non-Hindus did not feel comfortable with them because of the RSS. Most non-Hindi-speaking people were suspicious about the Jan Sangh because of their linguistic fanaticism. Congress (O) was a divided house, and their leader, Morarji Desai, was a suspect in South Indian eyes because of his perceived pro-Hindi views. His role prior to and during the 1965 anti-Hindi agitation had antagonised the Tamil population. His rift with Kamaraj had led to the DMK coming to power. Because of the above reasons, South India would vote en bloc for Indira. This was particularly so since the Emergency, its harshness, and perceived excesses were no issues in the South, because these were not felt in that part of the country.

About the composition of the united party that JP was contemplating to take on the Congress (I), he had only a broad framework in mind and details were to be thrashed out when the party would actually take shape. The framework would have Congress (O) with the socialist faction of Congress and the Bharatiya Lok Dal as core components. The RSS-backed Jan Sangh would provide the cadre base, which was essential

for facing elections at short notice. Parties like the DMK in Tamil Nadu and the Shromani Akali Dal in Punjab would provide the much-needed regional base.

I was astonished and pointed out that JP's views on several occasions had been sharply critical of the Jan Sangh and its communal hue. I specifically quoted his article in a journal way back in 1968: "When, following Gandhiji's murder, the RSS was under a shadow, there were many protestations made about its being entirely a cultural organisation. But apparently emboldened by the timidity of the secular forces, it has thrown its veil away and has emerged as the real force behind, and controller of, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh. The secular protestations of the Jana Sangh will never be taken seriously unless it cuts the bonds that tie it so firmly to the RSS machine. Nor can the RSS be treated as a cultural organisation as long as it remains the mentor and effective manipulator of a political party."

I asked JP that despite such a categorical disapproval, how he could associate with this 'communal organisation' in his fight against the Emergency rule and its eventual overthrow. JP was candid in describing the causes, criteria and compulsions leading to the decision to associate the Jan Sangh with the united opposition party. The main reasons were two. One was JP's unwillingness to opt for the alternative of associating with the Communists, the other cadre-based party, since according to him, "Communists were professional collaborators. They collaborated with the British and must now be collaborating with the Emergency coterie." Indeed, they were!

The second was the solemn

pledge taken by top RSS and Jan Sangh leaders—RSS Sarsanghchalak Balasaheb Deoras, previous President of Jan Sangh A.B. Vajpayee, then President of Jan Sangh L.K. Advani—in his presence to totally give up communal politics in the event of coming to power at the Centre. They had also categorically assured him that within a short period of coming to power, the Jan Sangh will merge with the parent party (yet to be formed) and they will terminate the ‘dual-membership’—RSS and Jan Sangh—making the former a purely cultural organisation. They also assured JP that if any hurdle came up for this, they would not hesitate to even wind up the RSS. And JP, being a man of his words, had no reason to doubt the honour and integrity of these senior leaders.

JP was clear that the monolithic and servile Congress Party had to be defeated if democracy was to be revived in the country. There was finality in the voice of JP when he said: “These parties merging and providing a viable alternative is the only hope for our democracy.” And I thought it prudent to leave it there.

The Great Betrayal: Dual membership gave birth to the BJP

In 2005, as BJP was celebrating its silver jubilee, its president LK Advani openly admitted that the party would not have been born in 1980 had the Janata Party not raised the issue of dual membership in the manner it did. “The Janata Party parliamentary board put forward the excuse of our dual membership as they thought that they would not be able to progress if we stayed with them,” Advani said after releasing a book on 25 years of the BJP.

According to him, the rationale behind the birth of the BJP lay in

the fact that the party opposed a ban on its ties with the RSS, which was sought to be imposed by the Janata Party leaders. RSS sahasarkaryavah, Madandas Devi, who presided over the function, put it more bluntly when he said: “The BJP stands on the backdrop of the Jan Sangh and the Jan Sangh stood on the backdrop of the RSS.”

Flashback to post-Emergency. After a delay of one-year, Indira Gandhi made the election announcement on January 18, 1977. When opposition leaders sought JP’s support for the forthcoming elections, he insisted that all opposition parties form a united front. Accordingly, the Janata party was officially launched on January 23, 1977 when the Janata Morcha, Bharatiya Lok Dal of Charan Singh, Swatantra Party, Socialist Party of India of Raj Narain and George Fernandes, and Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) joined together, dissolving their separate identities. The merger of all these party organisations was to be completed after the elections. Although the political ideologies of the various Janata constituents were diverse and conflicting, the party was able to unite them under the over-arching leadership of JP, who was seen as the ideological mentor of the anti-Emergency movement and now the Janata party.

Morarji Desai was elected the first party chairman, Ramakrishna Hegde became the party general secretary and Jana Sangh politician Lal Krishna Advani became the party spokesperson. After the Janata victory in March and elevation of Morarji Desai as Prime Minister, JP appointed his close confidante Chandra Shekhar as the Party president with a clear mandate to enforce the solemn undertaking

given by the Jan Sangh of merging with Janata Party and ending RSS–Jan Sangh ‘dual-membership’ within six months as had been agreed by it earlier.

True to his nature, Chandra Shekhar went about his task in all seriousness. During those days, the land-based telephone system was managed by the Department of Telecom and the Subscriber Trunk Dialing (STD) between cities was very porous and cross-talk was common. I used to call Chandra Shekhar once in a while to keep in touch. During one such call, I could hear a conversation between him and Raj Narain, the clownish socialist who had defeated Indira Gandhi at the hustings. When I heard the word RSS repeatedly, I got interested and listened to the entire conversation that lasted for about 15 minutes. It was all about the Jan Sangh / RSS U-turn on the ‘dual membership’ issue. The conversation was in Hindi and both of them used abusive language and choicest epithets about the RSS. They ended the conversation with a mutual understanding to force the issue. Accordingly, soon thereafter, the Janata Parliamentary Board (JPB) passed a resolution barring Janata functionaries from their day-to-day activities in RSS.

With a tradition of lies and double deals, it was obvious that the Sangh parivar was never serious about keeping its promise and was waiting for an excuse. It came in the form of the JPB resolution. The situation was manipulated by Jan Sangh hardliners and the RSS Pratinidhi Sabha refused to ratify the proposal when presented by Balasaheb Deoras. That was the end of the ‘dual-membership’ issue and merger of Janata Parivar as a single

Anita, Christine, and Me

Belle Chesler

entity. Said a saddened Janata Party president, Chandra Shekhar: "I did expect that Deoras would fulfil his promise. But I'm not surprised at the recent stand taken by the RSS. However, I fail to understand it."

Vijay Kumar Malhotra of the Jan Sangh, who was president of the Delhi Janata Party, tried to rationalise this perfidy when he said: "We are proud of our association with the RSS. We can't accept a decision on our association with the RSS from the Janata Party which makes the RSS appear as something undesirable. But if the RSS itself had decided to bar us, it would have been a different matter." Morarji Desai tried some patch-up but failed.

Nanaji Deshmukh, former RSS political commissar of the Jan Sangh and the one closest to JP, tried to apply some balm: "The Jan Sangh would do nothing to wreck the party unless we are compelled." But it appeared that the point of no return had been reached. Malhotra pulled the curtains down when he said: "To me it seems the time has come for a parting of ways. There is no other option. But it should be done in such a way that there is no bad blood so that we can have at least an honest coalition in the future."

Madhu Dandavate

By

B. Vivekanandan

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It's been three weeks since Dr. Christine Blasey Ford gave her testimony before the nation and I'm still struggling to move on. As talk turns toward the impending midterms, I find myself mentally pushing back against the relentlessness of the news cycle as it plows on, casting a spell of cultural amnesia in its wake. I'm still mired in the past, shaken by the spectacle of the Kavanaugh hearings, and pulled across the decades into the darkest crevasses of my memories.

In October 1991, I sat perched on a stool in Mr. Bundeson's seventh grade woodshop class listening with fascination as Anita Hill testified about her experience of sexual harassment by then Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas. To a seventh grader, the details, both surprisingly specific and appealingly lurid, were especially intriguing. What 13-year-old could have resisted the simultaneously bizarre and gross testimony regarding a pubic hair placed on a can of Coke? We were riveted. Who could make something like that up? Over the course of the hearing, our teachers rolled out TVs on carts and let the proceedings play during our classes. It felt like we were sharing a significant national moment and watching together meant we were all a part of history being made.

The full import of that experience wouldn't hit me, however, until the week I turned 40 and watched Dr. Ford telling her story in front of another judiciary committee. This time, I was looking at the computer on my desk at the suburban high

school in Oregon where I've taught visual art and film studies for the past 14 years. Taking in her testimony, I found myself growing distraught. As her voice quavered, I felt a surge of emotion so strong it seemed to paralyze me. I couldn't stop looking even though I knew something inside was tearing me apart and that, no matter my emotional state, I would still have to pull myself together to face my first class of the day, only moments away. As the camera zeroed in on Dr. Ford's face, her nervous gesturing at her hair, and the tears shimmering in the corners of her eyes, I couldn't shake the feeling that I was watching a woman sacrificing herself before the nation, just as Anita Hill had done so many years before.

As she recounted her experience with Brett Kavanaugh and Mark Judge, the internal wall of fortitude I'd built up over the years started to crumble. That wall, which had bricked in so many experiences—the catcalls, the comments from a high school teacher who praised my muscular legs in front of the class, the years spent with an abusive boyfriend, the boss who liked to show me his favorite porn, the men who exposed themselves to me in a park, on a bus, from a van—all started to spill out. There were too many experiences to catalogue so many years later, but they'd been there the whole time, ever present yet totally unmentionable. I had no idea how I'd make it through the day.

Walking into my first-period class on the history of motion pictures, it was clear that many of

my students had been watching Dr. Ford's testimony as well. Looking at them as they huddled around their phones, I was transported back to the seventh grade. I remembered how, during the Hill–Thomas hearings, we chatted at our small table in that woodshop class, making jokes, both confused and titillated by the spectacle. It was surreal to hear adults recounting interactions both intimate and grotesque in the most formal setting imaginable.

At that time, I'd never so much as kissed a boy, but I intuited that the nation's fascination with what had transpired between Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas had something to do with the way that older men had started to look at me that year. My absorption in the hearings ultimately manifested itself in a project I created that fall. I designed and made a cutting board with a silhouette of a fish carved out of black walnut surrounded by a sea of white pine. I named that cutting board Anita Hill.

The messiness of the world

Teaching is often a balancing act between revealing enough of yourself to be seen as approachable and genuine and maintaining the privacy and distance that is part and parcel of professionalism, while keeping personal boundaries clear. Much of my teaching philosophy stems from the belief that individual and community relationships are the foundation upon which all learning should take place. Students, I'm convinced, learn best when they feel comfortable in your classroom. Delivering content is sometimes less important than creating an environment in which they feel visible and know that their voices are heard. In order to establish that sense of community, I start each class with

a circle as a way to connect. We put down our phones, make eye contact, and simply share what's going on in our lives. Sometimes we chat about the inconsequential details of our days: our weekend plans, what classes are stressing us out, funny anecdotes. Sometimes we go deeper.

As we gathered in our circle that morning, I looked out at my students' sleepy faces and that veil of professionalism and privacy unexpectedly fell away. Suddenly, I was saying out loud what I'd only told a few close friends and family members: I, too, had been sexually assaulted. I'd spent a lifetime, I explained, being brave and strong, moving on with purpose and determination, and ensuring that the experiences I'd withstood had been formative yet not definitive. My students sat in stunned silence. I told them that sometimes the messiness of the world seeps into the classroom and that today, despite my best efforts, I'd been unable to shut it out.

What I didn't tell them were the details of my story. That it happened in Peru. My friend and I were staying at a small guest house in a surfing town on the northern coast. We'd been there for a few days, enough time to become friendly with the owner, his wife, and their small child. So when I ducked into our room one afternoon to get something—what, I can't remember—and found that man suddenly in the room with me, I was taken off guard. He quickly pinned me against a wall, one hand on my breast, the other clutching the machete he had been using just minutes before to hack away at overgrown shrubs around the property. He told me that my eyes were the color of the sea. He pushed his hips against mine. Without

thinking, I used all of my strength to shove him away. The rest is a blur. I know that somehow I ran from the room and found my friend, but I don't remember how we left, who packed my things, or how we got to the bus that would take us from that town. All those details are gone. His face, his smell, and that machete are not.

Will it matter?

As the Kavanaugh hearings went on, more and more students became invested in watching them. Some asked to listen on headphones while we worked, some just wanted to talk about what they'd heard. As each class began, I addressed the fact that I'd been crying all day—no point in pretending, teenagers notice everything—and explained why. As I talked, I noted certain students around the room crumpling. Bodies pulled in on themselves, heads lowered. Some students shyly wiped away tears. A few of them asked to leave the room to get some air.

One student, bubbly and cheerful as she entered, became despondent when her peers told her about what was happening in Washington. Unable to listen to the descriptions of the hearing, she swiveled so that her body was facing away from the circle and put her head down on a table. I waited for a quiet moment to sit down next to her. Without any pretense and in a no-nonsense monotone, she informed me that she was just one of a group of girls who had been assaulted by a senior boy the previous year. She was unwilling to tell her parents, fearful that they'd never let her out of the house alone again. While I was sitting with her, our school security officer came into the classroom to get her so she could be interviewed by someone already

investigating the case. The timing was impeccable.

The hardest part of that day wasn't sharing my story or opening up to groups of teenagers about the intimate details of my past. It was listening as my students argued about whether or not Dr. Ford's testimony would even matter. In their comments, I heard echoes of my own internal struggle. The experience of watching Anita Hill being picked apart and ultimately dismissed by those male senators in front of the entire nation had a powerful effect on my burgeoning seventh-grade sense of how to conduct myself as a woman: that even though I now had a name for what I, too, might experience—sexual harassment—if I called that thing out or made too much of a fuss, I would be the one who paid the price.

One of my students came up to me after class and told me that, though her stepbrother had assaulted her when she was younger, no one in her family believed her. She assured me that she was fine now because she had moved away and didn't have to see him anymore. As she was telling me this, I couldn't help imagining her, 10 or 20 years down the line, reflecting with startled pain on the way her own family dismissed her, the way the people charged with her love and care wouldn't or couldn't believe her.

Those laughing faces

At a rally in Mississippi on October 2nd, President Trump made a point of mocking Dr. Ford's testimony, joking about whether or not she had really consumed only one beer and highlighting her inability to remember certain details of the night she claimed that Brett Kavanaugh had assaulted her. What

fascinated me was not the obvious cruelty of his series of low blows, but the beaming smiles and laughter of the men and women in that crowd of supporters in Southaven, Mississippi.

I couldn't help but wonder how many of them, beneath that veneer of laughter, had felt a twinge of something familiar in the pit of their stomach as they listened to Ford's testimony. How many of the men in that crowd had given a passing thought to that one beer-soaked night in high school they barely remembered, the one that might have been the single most painful night of someone else's life? How many of those laughing women were secretly reminded of something painful buried deep in their own pasts? How many of them would not or could not dredge up experiences long suppressed, fearful of the personal toll that such a reckoning might take? How many of them would be shocked to know about assaults suffered by their own children?

I wish I could say that, while the hearings consumed the nation, I stood in front of my students and made powerful speeches about moving forward with hope and courage, about telling the truth and respecting one another. I did try, but I have no faith that I did a particularly good job of it.

Instead, in a sometimes halting, sometimes teary voice I talked about consent, about kindness, about how compassion and empathy can be transformative. I told them that I would listen, even when it seemed like no one else would. I believed what I was saying and yet there was still that enormous emotional weight in my chest, the weight of Anita Hill's legacy, of Dr. Ford's testimony, of a lifetime of unwanted encounters,

of the rapes and attempted rapes of loved ones and friends, of the stories my students shared with me during the hearings, as well as in the years that preceded them. It was a weight that made it hard to speak, let alone lead my students. In the end, I ran out of words and fell back on silence.

Ultimately, of course, Christine Blasey Ford's testimony, though deemed credible by those on both sides of the political aisle, didn't alter the course of Judge Kavanaugh's trajectory. He will sit on that hallowed bench, the residue of those hearings fading into an inconvenient stain on the CV of an otherwise charmed life. For those of us still struggling to move forward, the memory of the hearings, and all it represented, will be seared, as Dr. Ford might have put it, into the hippocampus, never to fade.

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UN Report: Revolution Needed to Prevent Climate Disaster

James Plested

Only a revolution can save us. That's the take home message of the latest report from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), released on 8 October.

Based on emissions reduction commitments made under the 2015 Paris agreement, the world is on track for an average temperature increase of 3 degrees Celsius. Those commitments, however, are hardly worth the paper they're written on.

Australia has promised to reduce its emissions to 26–28 percent below 2005 levels by 2030. Yet since signing the agreement, emissions have continued to rise. The government is headed by a man whose passion for coal led him to bring a lump of the stuff into parliament—waving it in the air and passing it around to the delight of his Coalition colleagues.

Donald Trump has pulled the US out of the agreement.

Even countries that have voiced support for the Paris agreement continue to expand their own fossil fuel industries. The British government is pushing to allow gas fracking. Norway, Western Europe's largest oil and gas producer, recently defeated a legal bid to block exploration of its Arctic territories for new resources to exploit.

Failure to change course rapidly will spell disaster for hundreds of millions of people. The destruction of the Great Barrier Reef, and all other coral reefs around the world, will come first. These natural treasures, on which 500 million people depend for their livelihoods,

may be gone by the middle of the century.

Under a 3 degree warming scenario, large areas of the world will be rendered uninhabitable. Deserts will expand into vital agricultural land. Sea level rises, which will continue for centuries as the polar ice caps melt, will force tens of millions to vacate coastal towns and cities.

Tens of millions more will be turned into refugees by severe food shortages caused by declining agricultural yields, the destruction of fisheries and so on. Already, with 68.5 million displaced people in the world, countries everywhere are transforming themselves into authoritarian, anti-refugee fortresses. In an era of climate migration, this tendency will intensify.

The world's imperialist powers, including those, like Australia and the US, that are doing nothing to address climate change, are ensuring that their militaries are "climate change ready". We're entering an era of increasing geopolitical tensions caused by competition over scarce natural resources—an era of climate wars.

The global average temperature is already 1 degree above pre-industrial levels. We're already seeing an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather and natural disasters such as heat waves, droughts, cyclones, floods and fires. At 3 degrees warmer, such events will be a "new normal"—with death and destruction visited on communities with increasing regularity.

All this assumes that the

most apocalyptic scenarios won't eventuate. These include, for example, the rapid release of methane and other greenhouse gases trapped in the Arctic permafrost, which could cause runaway temperature rises well beyond current forecasts.

The IPCC report was authored by 91 scientists from 40 countries, referenced more than 6,000 scientific works, and was reviewed by 42,000 experts and government representatives from around the world. If anything, it's highly conservative.

Commissioned in 2015, its aim is merely to outline the benefits and necessary steps for achieving the Paris agreement's stated goal of limiting the rise in global temperatures to 1.5 degrees.

When the agreement was made, the scientific consensus was that 2 degrees was the "safe limit" beyond which we risk being propelled into dangerous runaway warming. The new report makes it clear that even 2 degrees is too great a risk.

The difference between 1.5 degrees of warming and 2 degrees is significant. As the report outlines, for example, a 1.5 degree warmer world would likely lose 70-80 percent of its coral reefs; at 2 degrees warmer, more than 99 percent of coral would die.

At 1.5 degrees warmer, the report notes, "9.6 percent of insects, 8 percent of plants and 4 percent of vertebrates are projected to lose over half of their climatically determined geographic range". At 2 degrees warmer, the figures double to 18 percent of insects, 16 percent of

plants and 8 percent of vertebrates”.

Perhaps the most striking thing about the report, however, is its description of the steps necessary for the world to have a chance of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees. This would require, the authors argue, “rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society. . . . Global net human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide would need to fall by about 45 percent from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching ‘net zero’ around 2050.”

Achieving this would involve an immediate and sharp turn from the current emissions trajectory—one that the world’s major emitters show no sign of being prepared to undertake.

The Australian government is determined to continue with its criminal inaction. Prime minister Scott Morrison told Sydney’s radio 2GB: “We are not held to any of the [IPCC recommendations], and nor are we bound by them.” Deputy prime minister Michael McCormack defended the coal industry, arguing it would continue to play an important role in Australia’s economy for decades to come. He says the government shouldn’t change its policy “just because somebody might suggest that some sort of report is the way we need to follow and everything that we should do.”

Environment minister Melissa Price made perhaps the most bizarre comment—that it would be “irresponsible” for Australia to commit to phasing out coal by 2050. “I just don’t know how you can say by 2050 you are not going to have technology, good clean technology, when it comes to coal”, she said.

The government’s response confirms what most already know: that they run the country not on behalf of all its people, but in the

service of the fossil fuel barons and associated capitalists and investors, who are more than prepared to watch the world burn if it means a few extra billions in profits.

If there’s one thing the past three decades of inaction on climate change has shown, it’s that we can’t rely on governments—in Australia’s case, either of the Liberal or Labor variety—to heed the warnings of scientists and take the steps necessary to halt our slide towards climate catastrophe. None of them are prepared to break with the logic of capitalism, in which the competitive drive to profit rules, and anything that gets in the way of that is to be shunned.

The time for tinkering around the edges is long gone. To achieve the rapid emissions reductions called for in the IPCC report requires a total reshaping of society and the economy. This can’t happen under the auspices of free market capitalism.

The environment movement would do well to reflect on this point. Over the past few decades, it’s poured its energies into lobbying governments and big business—trying to convince them to curb emissions on the basis of scientific arguments about the consequences for the planet if they fail to do so.

This strategy has been a disaster. It’s not that the global capitalist elite and their political servants don’t understand the consequences of their actions. It’s that they know a serious effort to address climate change will put their wealth, power and privileges at risk.

The CDP *Carbon Majors Report*, released in 2017, found that just 100 companies are responsible for more than 70 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions since 1988. These companies are among

the most profitable and politically influential in the world. No amount of rational argument will stop them from continuing their social and environmental vandalism.

The Paris agreement was welcomed by mainstream environment groups as a major breakthrough. The Australian Conservation Foundation, for instance, said it “signals the end of the fossil fuel age and will turbo charge the clean energy revolution already underway.” To continue with such illusions now would be fatal. The IPCC report, just like the Paris agreement, will change nothing without mass, determined action from all who want to save us from the looming catastrophe.

In the 17th century, Galileo got into hot water with the Roman Catholic Inquisition for promoting the “fable” that the earth revolved around the sun. Today, the persecution of such figures is rightly regarded as a last gasp of medieval superstition protecting the privileges of the religious elite against the encroachments of modern science.

The capitalist ruling class’s refusal to act on the observations of contemporary climate science is more regressive and damaging than anything the Inquisition could muster. The world could have survived a few more centuries under the boot of religious despotism. A few more centuries under the despotism of free market capitalism will leave it damaged probably beyond repair.

Our situation is aptly summed up by Nathan Robison, editor of US magazine *Current Affairs*:

There is a famous old left phrase, ‘socialism or barbarism’: there is no choice but to find a way to stop capitalism’s destructive logic, because if left unchecked it will create catastrophe.



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It was Death by Mob Lynching and State Sponsored Killing

Sandeep Pandey, Lubna Sarwath and Gurumoorthy M.

Whether it was a slightly high dose of potassium at the All Indian Institute of Medical Sciences at Rishikesh which ultimately caused cardiac arrest or deliberate neglect by the government about his 112 days of fast-unto-death to demand a law for conservation of Ganga by Professor Guru Das Agrawal turned Swami Sanand, the Central Government and especially the Prime Minister will be held responsible for his death. Matre Sadan, the ashram in Haridwar where Professor Agrawal fasted, has accused the government of murder by poisoning him. A 2011 case of murder by poisoning of Swami Nigmanand, a young hermit also associated with Matre Sadan, who fasted for 115 days against illegal sand mining in Ganga, is pending in court.

Professor Agrawal had forewarned the government about his fast by writing to the PM twice. He then again wrote to him twice during the fast. The PM, otherwise known to open his mind regularly in public broadcasts known as Mann ki Baat, chose not to respond, until after Professor Agrawal's death when he tweeted a condolence. The PM has similarly maintained silence on

critical issues like violence against Muslims, Dalits and the 'Me Too campaign'.

Governments play the trick of making an accused out of a victim to politically coverup, and it has become more of a wont under the present Bhartiya Janta Party government in power. Some unknown person is being accused by the authorities of not letting Professor G.D. Agrawal give up his fast. Those who know Professor Agrawal well are aware of his steely resolve. He would tell his well wishers during the marathon fast, 'Worry about Ganga, not about me.' He had chosen the beginning of his fast on Ganga Dussehra, giving up water on the first day of Navratra and predicted his demise before Vijaydashmi. As a true scientist he even planned his death meticulously. The government by accusing Professor Agrawal of continuing his fast under duress wants to divert attention from the main demands that he was making of the government: to enact a law for conservation of Ganga, to halt all hydroelectric projects on it, to ban mining and deforestation activities in its vicinity and to form

a council consisting of people sensitive to Ganga to oversee its interest. It was too embarrassing for the government whose PM contested his parliamentary election from Varanasi declaring that he got a call from mother Ganga, which altered the name of Water Resources ministry to include Ganga Rejuvenation in it, which committed itself to clean Ganga by 2019 and then revised the deadline to 2020, which has already spent 23% of the sanctioned Rs 23,323 crore budget for the purpose, to admit that the health of Ganga has worsened instead of improving during its regime and therefore Professor Agrawal was forced to go on fast.

The country and the world is witnessing horrific protests against the entry of women of all ages to Sabarimala temple in Kerala, which has been facilitated by an order of the Supreme Court. These protests have received a stamp of approval by chief of Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, the ideological parent of ruling BJP. On the other hand, these very same cadres of Hindutva organisations, with proclivity for various degrees of militancy and who leave no opportunity of exploiting people's religious sentiments, have maintained an eerie silence on the issues raised by Prof. G.D. Agrawal related to protecting Ganga. It exposes the true nature of these right wing organisations. It is clear that politics of polarisation takes precedence over religious-cultural-nationalism issues. RSS has various weapons in its arsenal. This time it chose ostracism of Professor Agrawal on a mass scale and hence it was mob lynching by adopting stoic silence and managing the media so that Professor Agrawal's fast isn't highlighted. Compare

the mass hysteria created by Anna Hazare's short fasts a few years back, which the RSS had helped build up, to the conspicuously absent response from anywhere in the country to Professor Agrawal's long fast. Was Professor Agrawal raising an issue less important than corruption? Corruption can probably be fixed more easily than the damage to environment being caused by our developmental policies. The support to a retrogressive stand on Sabarimala temple entry by RSS-BJP is as shameful as their insensitivity towards the progressive issue of Ganga rejuvenation. Even though the RSS chief has vehemently resented that it is always Hindus who face persecution, the BJP should answer why Muslim women were chosen for 'equality' through an ordinance which jails husbands on a civil matrimonial issue of triple talaq while denying equality to Hindu women who laid claim to visit the Sabarimala temple as their fundamental right?

Professor G.D. Agrawal was an extraordinary scholar not just in the modern sense of knowledge but also in the traditional sense of wisdom. On top of it he was a saint in the true sense, not the kind whose sectarian outlook exacerbates religious polarisation in society, resulting in strife. In fact, Professor Agrawal was against exhibitionist tendencies of religion. The death of such a saintly figure is going to cost the government dear. The saints of Matre Sadan have decided to continue the struggle of Professor Agrawal by resorting to fasting from 24 October, 2018.

The outlook of Professor Agrawal was at variance with that of government, because of which no reconciliation was possible. To

give an example, during his fast, a copy of the draft 'The National River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Bill, 2018', prepared by the government was given to him by Rajiv Ranjan Mishra, Director General of National Mission for Clean Ganga, for his comments. In this, he changed the sentence 'Parliament declared it expedient and in larger public interest to take control for prevention, control, abatement of pollution and rejuvenation of river Ganga,' to 'Parliament declared it expedient and in larger public interest to lay down the responsibility for maintaining desirable flows and water, sediment and ecological quality and thus rejuvenation of river Ganga.' The government has conceived of a 'Ganga Protection Corps' as an armed force which shall follow the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, for the purpose of enforcement, rejuvenation, protection and management of river Ganga under the proposed Act and treat offences under this Act punishable as cognisable and non-bailable. Professor Agrawal on the contrary wanted people sensitive to and with a deep understanding about Ganga to form a council which would take responsibility for protection of the river. It has been alleged that Professor Agrawal wanted a religious body to decide on how Ganga ought to be taken care of. This is not true. He wanted the PM to provisionally nominate a 20 member Ganga Bhakta ('Devotee') Parishad (till June 2019), who were to take an oath standing in the waters of Ganga to act in its interest. He nowhere said that these 20 people have to be necessarily religious. In fact, Professor Agrawal didn't want pliant bureaucrats, who have been commercially exploiting

Ganga in nexus with their political masters, to head the body tasked with taking care of Ganga's interest. In less than five years, the head of National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) has been changed seven times. Professor Agrawal wanted autonomy on the lines of that given to Indian Institute of Technology for this supreme body on Ganga. Thus, in contrast to the bureaucratic approach of the Government, that wanted to protect Ganga by policing, Professor Agrawal's outlook was humane and ecological and he wanted to protect Ganga by people's participation.

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From Allahabad to Prayagraj: What's in the Name?

Ram Puniyani

Adityanath Yogi, the Chief Minister of UP, seems to be on a name changing spree. In his latest move, he has changed the name of Allahabad, a famous city of UP, to Prayagraj. Prayag is the meeting point of rivers and since this city is the meeting point of Ganga, Yamuna and probably of the invisible Sarswati, this name might have been chosen by him in his attempts to remove the Islamic touch to the names of our cities. There are many versions about the origins of the name Allahabad. One is that it was Ila-vas, Ila being the mother of mythological Pururva. Another version says it was named after Alha of Alha-Udal (part of popular folklore) fame. Historical records and the coins of that time tell us that Akbar had named it Illaha-bad or Illahi-bas. Illaha is a generic term for God. He regarded this city as a holy city of Hindus and Illah-bas in Persian means 'abode of Gods'. This reflects the inclusive spirit of Akbar. Before this, the Yogi had changed the name of Mughal Sarai to Pundit Deendayal Upadhyay Junction, Urdu Bazar to Hindi Bazar, Ali Nagar to Arya Nagar, etc. He regards all Muslim sounding names as being alien.

In an interview, Yogi said he has to change many more names. On his agenda is to change the name Taj Mahal to Ram Mahal, Azamgarh to Aryamgarh, and to cap it all, change the name India in our Constitution to Hindustan. According to him, these places were renamed after invasion of Muslim kings, so there is a need

to re-change them. Before Yogi, Mayawati had indulged in this name changing game, which was to some extent reversed by her successor Akhilesh Yadav. Now, in a more persistent way, Yogi is identifying the Muslim sounding names and changing them one by one.

Adityanath Yogi is the Mahant of the famous Gorakhnath Math. His predecessor in the Math was also in politics, and the Yogi has been a major player on the political chess board in UP. He comes from the Hindu Mahasabha stream of politics. His dominance has been very visible as his slogan, *UP mein rahna hai to Yogi Yogi kahna hoga* (If you want to stay in UP, you have to chant Yogi-Yogi) had been prevalent in parts of UP. His Hindu Yuva Vahini has been in the news off and on, not for right reasons. He is one among the large number of holy men like Sakshi Maharaj, Sadhvi Uma Bharati, Sadhvi Niranjan Jyoti, etc. who have been a part of the Hindu nationalist agenda. As such, holy men are supposed to have renounced the world to focus on spiritual pursuits, but this lot seems to be more active in worldly pursuits.

This phenomenon of holy men-women entering politics seems to be there in many post-colonial states. In these countries, there has been an absence of radical land reforms and the hold of the landlord-clergy has continued, which seems to be the reason for holy people to be in the political arena. These holy men and women oppose democratic values as being Western or alien, and claim

that these values are against the spirit of 'our' land. They in a way harp on the pre-industrial values of birth based hierarchies. One of the most prominent of these holy men was Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran, who was later succeeded by many Ayatollahs. In Pakistan, the Mullahs have been working closely with the military and landlord elements to undermine democratic possibilities in society. A prominent name that emerged there was that of Maulana Maududi, who worked closely with Zia Ul Haq to further Islamisation of Pakistan. In neighboring Myanmar, monks like Ashin Wirathu, also called 'Burma's Bin Laden', are active in politics and oppose democracy and target the religious minorities there.

In India, we see these holy men dominating the political scene in various ways. Most of these godmen-women have been part of Hindu nationalist movement and are very vicious as far as hate speech is concerned. One recalls that Sadhvi Niranjana Jyoti had used the word *haramzade*, while Sakshi Maharaj was booked for blaming Muslims for population growth. Yogi himself has many cases pending against as far as hate speech is concerned. The worst of these was when he advised the rape of dead Muslim women.

Yogi has intensified the communal agenda to no end. The UP state is organising Hindu religious festivals. One recalls that on the occasion of Diwali, a helicopter carrying Lord Ram and Sita landed and the gods were received by Yogi himself. UP State also organised the lighting of lamps in big numbers. Recently Yogi has again been in the news for declaring that the state government will spend Rs 5,000 crores for the Kumbh mela. All this is taking place at a time when the

state is suffering a severe crunch with regards to health care and other infrastructure related issues. There have been several incidents of young children and infants dying in hospitals for lack of facilities. The cities whose names have been changed languish because of bad infrastructure. UP state continues to rank at the bottom in human growth indices. The human rights condition in the state continues to be abysmal. The condition of minorities is worsening because of

state sponsored moves to trample on their livelihood, such as the order to shut down 'illegal' slaughter houses and meat shops that was issued soon after Yogi came to power in UP.

Yogi has also bluntly stated that secularism is a big lie. His actions are showing how he is forcing the march of the state in the direction of Hindu nation, without any qualms for the secular values enshrined in our Constitution!

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Backdoor Entry of GM Foods into India

Bharat Dogra

The ability of civil society to prevent the cultivation of genetically modified (GM) brinjal and mustard was so far seen as a big achievement of India's democracy as, in a David vs. Goliath fight, activist groups had managed somehow to defeat very powerful lobbies with huge moneybags. However, as more and more evidence of the backdoor entry of GM foods into India surfaces, the earlier feeling of pride in a hard-won battle is being replaced by a deep worry that very serious risks related to GM foods already exist on a large-scale in India.

This backdoor entry of GM foods has taken place in five ways. (i) Due to glaring failures on the part of regulating agencies, GM food imports have been taking place in a big way for several years. These include edible oils (mainly canola and soyabean oil), several breakfast foods and snacks and even infant formulas. (ii) Several domestic food processing units have been using these imported GM oils to produce snacks and other food products on a large scale. (iii) While GM cotton

grown in our country is generally regarded as only a commercial crop and not a food crop, the cottonseed oil obtained from this home-grown crop is being widely used to produce snack foods and other commonly used foods as it is much cheaper than other edible oils. (iv) Because they are much cheaper, both imported and domestic GM oils are being used in a big way to prepare hydrogenated oil or the so-called vanaspati ghee. (v) The dairy animals which feed on GM cotton crop residues and GM cottonseed oilcake are likely to produce milk which has GM ingredients. In fact research at several places has already revealed that a large number of farm animals who fed on GM cotton crop residues have suffered serious health problems.

It is truly shocking that the food safety implications of growing GM cotton have been ignored for so long by the regulating agencies. It is equally inexplicable how, despite GM foods being illegal in India, the import of GM foods has been allowed for so long on a large

scale. All available evidence points to massive negligence and worse. While closing their eyes to GM imports, the very same authorities at the same time illiberally placed many curbs on organic farmers in India and the marketing of their produce.

Recent testing by the Centre for Science and Environment of 65 food products (35 imported, 30 domestic) suspected to be GM contaminated found evidence of GM ingredients in 32 per cent of these 65 products. Almost 80 per cent of these products were imported. Only 4 packaged foods admitted to the presence of GM ingredients. Most of these products simply did not carry any information about GM content; while in 2 cases, false information was provided. GM ingredients were found even in imported infant formulas for very vulnerable children.

All this is very disturbing as the high health risks of GM foods have been well-established by the work of several senior scientists who refused to accept the sponsorship of very powerful multinational companies promoting GM foods and crops. Eminent scientists from several countries, who came together to launch an Independent Science Panel on GM, said about GM crops, "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." This is confirmed by dozens of studies and reviews of these studies by very eminent scientists. What is most worrying in the context of India is that most of the millions of consumers of GM foods are not even aware that they are consuming GM food, as in most cases it is

being sold without any labeling, and even in the very few cases where some information is given on the packaging, people are not aware of its implications. Clearly we need a big campaign to make people aware

of all health implications and at the same time make the regulating authorities more committed to fulfilling their responsibilities in more honest and careful ways.

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Who Will Speak Truth to Unfreedom?

Neera Chandhoke

It is time to re-read the politically charged play, *The House of Bernarda Alba* (1936), by Federico García Lorca. After their father's death, five young women are forced to live in a barricaded house of mourning for eight years. The doors are latched, windows are curtained with thick black fabric, and every nook and cranny closed. The consequences of living in claustrophobic spaces without men are tragic. The sisters repeatedly attack each other in grotesque performances of frustrated desire.

Bernarda, the mother, is the poster-girl of fascism. One of her daughters dares to wear make-up, Bernarda snatches the make-up and viciously smears it on the face of the young woman. Beyond the barred room, we catch tantalising glimpses of sunlight. Within the house we encounter pitifully deformed psyches and disturbed minds. Lorca authored a formidable play. It was to be his last. Shortly after, he was murdered by fascist forces in Spain. His message remains with us, repressed sexuality is a powerful metaphor for political frustration.

Costs of subjugation

Lorca proved prophetic. Open societies encourage us to accept and welcome different ideas and practices. They liberate and

expand our imaginations and our commitments. When societies turn inwards, they construct barricades between themselves and the outside world. At some point members transfer the notion of the outsider to parts of the collective self. Political subjugation carries heavy costs.

Ruled by a government that verges on authoritarianism, Indians have turned savagely on their own fellow citizens, sometimes in the name of cow-protection, and often because someone has identified A or B as a kidnapper. Sometimes individuals are attacked because they are migrant workers and therefore 'outsiders', and often because they are represented as 'infiltrators'. Disorder is the order of the day, and violence is the currency of social transactions. Sane voices have to speak up.

But where will these sane voices come from? The party in power has identified and cracked down on three sites of debate and dissent, the media, civil society and the public university. Incalculable damage has been done. Public universities are accessible and affordable. They provide training in skills, but more importantly, they expose young minds to nuanced debates in the social sciences and the humanities. The objective is to fine-tune sensibilities and push back

horizons, familiarise young people with the best in literature, philosophy, political science, history, sociology, aesthetics and psychology, and keep alive the spirit of critical inquiry.

Power of the humanities

That is why imaginatively designed courses in the humanities and social sciences lie at the heart of any university worth its name. They encourage students to challenge and interrogate, even as they explore the past and the present. Teachers inspire students to understand the complexities of the human condition, to know what should be done for human beings, and what should not be done to them. Above all students are introduced to categories that allow them to think, reflect, and critically engage with people, places and things.

When academics acquaint students with Indian politics through the searing prose of Shrilal Shukla's *Raag Darbari*, communicate the densities of human emotions through *King Lear*, acquaint them with spectres of domination and the exhilarating prospect of resistance through the poetic lens of *Antigone*, or convey the horrors of communal conflagration through the powerful pen of Yashpal in his *Jhootha Sach*, they do not just transmit information—they contribute to the making of knowledge. In the process, university teachers promote the notion of citizenship as solidarity with the less advantaged and warn students of the horrors of authoritarian rule that seeks to control and dominate. The idea is to produce aware and enlightened citizens conscious of their own power and the responsibilities of an elected government.

This is precisely why the

latest avatar of capitalism in the 1990s, neoliberalism, devalued social sciences and humanities. Capitalism demands docile bodies and submissive minds. In 2010, Terry Eagleton, the celebrated literary critic, spoke of the death of universities. Academia, he rued, has become a servant of the status quo. Can we have a university without the humanities? It would be like a bar without alcohol! If history and philosophy vanish from academic life, they may be replaced by a technical training facility or corporate research institute, he wrote. But this will not be a university in the classic sense of the term. Eagleton is perceptive. Without critical disciplines, universities are no more than teaching shops, producing so much unthinking labour for the market.

The second attack on the university has come from the current government. Shortly after they came to power in 2014, leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party began to demonise one of the finest centres of academic excellence and enlightened debate, the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). Ignoble attempts to subjugate the faculty and students followed. This was replicated in other Central universities by the appointment of Vice-Chancellors of questionable merit, and the elevation of storm troopers of the ruling party to faculty positions.

Now the government has decided that teaching and research have to be controlled. University administrations have ruled that faculties of Central universities will be subject to Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules. This, it is said, is the diktat of the University Grants Commission, which is at best a funding and administrative

organisation. In JNU, the decision has been adopted without regard for procedures of rule-making: the passage of a proposed policy through the Academic Council, the Executive Council and the University Court.

Starkly put, these regulations stipulate that academics cannot protest, howsoever grave be the provocation. In the academic world, invitations to join editorial boards of prestigious journals are rightly seen as a justifiable reward for academic excellence. This is now banned. Faculty members cannot criticise the policies of the government in their research work. Nor can they dare to critique a flawed foreign policy. And they cannot join political parties.

Just court history

The policy strikes at the very idea of a public university that embodies the spirit of critical inquiry. Now no academic can ask her students to reflect on the shortcomings of economic policies that reproduce inequality, on social practices that foster gender and caste discrimination, on the politics of intolerance, on historical inquiry, or on cultural practices that disable rights in the name of tradition. Academic research has been reduced to court history.

It is clear that holders of power and their academic courtiers have extracted retribution and punished those who have dared to speak back to unfreedom. But in the process, the ruling party and compliant Vice-Chancellors have shot themselves in the foot. A society is known ultimately by the knowledge its universities and research centres produce, by the excellence of the faculty and by the curiosity of the students. Today, knowledge has been replaced with trite information.

Mediocrity rules, and eminent academics are crudely harassed. Above all, the order demeans reputed academics the precise way in which Bernarda, the mother in Lorca's play, humiliated her

daughter. The difference is that now the censor board will gag analytical and insightful scholarship. Instead of strengthening the public university, which was meant to be

a training ground for citizenship, the government has deliberately weakened an academic structure that has great potential to chart a route to opportunity and social justice.

Jayaprakash Narayan: An Idealist Betrayed – Part III

M.G. Devasahayam

The third part of a personal epitaph on Jayaprakash Narayan by former civil servant M.G. Devasahayam.

RSS—A Reality Check

This is what RSS claims itself to be in its website: "A unique phenomenon in the history of Bharat in the twentieth century is the birth and unceasing growth of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. The Sangh's sphere of influence has been spreading far and wide, not only inside Bharat but also abroad, like the radiance of a many-splendoured diamond. Sangh-inspired institutions and movements today form a strong presence in social, cultural, educational, labour, developmental, political and other fields of nationalist endeavour. Sangh-initiated movements—be they social-reformist or anti-secessionist—evoke a ready response and approbation from the common multitudes as well as from vast numbers of the elite of different shades. It has increasingly been recognised that the Sangh is not a mere reaction to one or another social or political aberration. It represents a corpus of thought and action firmly rooted in genuine nationalism and in the age-old tradition of this country."

Indeed, RSS has grown phenomenally during the past five

decades. Its swyamsewaks now hold the top four constitutional posts of President, Vice President, Prime Minister and Lok Sabha speaker. They occupy 20 Raj Bhawans as Governors, some of whom even actively participate in and manage shakhas!

Eighteen of them are chief ministers. Half the Union Cabinet comprises RSS members. The political initiation of over 1,000 MLAs and 250 MPs has been through the RSS. About a million Indians daily attend the over 55,000 shakhas across the country. Its 500-odd frontal organisations manage colleges, schools, media, hospitals, and tribal and Dalit NGOs. Ten thousand full-time pracharaks are active in politics, culture and various think tanks at home and abroad.

Despite such impressive achievements and claims, there is a sense of guilt among the RSS brass and it feels isolated. To undo this, RSS chief Dr Mohanrao Bhagwat organised the Bhavishya Ka Bharat (India of the Future) talk-show to over 1,000 prominent citizens from across the national spectrum at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, from September 17 to 19, 2018. The idea was to start a meaningful dialogue between the powerful and the hopeful. Bhagwat took an array of questions and responded to them with aplomb. He made it a point to

emphasise that RSS is the "most democratic organisation" with a past in the freedom struggle and a desire to work for society while shunning all publicity.

Bhagwat also came out with several sweeping statements on Hindutva, Ram Mandir dispute, mob lynchings, women empowerment and religious conversions which were in sharp contrast to the actions of the Sangh parivar on the ground, indicating callous hypocrisy! Here are few instances:

- Mohan Bhagwat said, "We want a Hindu Rashtra but that does not mean we don't want Muslims in it." In 2017, RSS leader Kundan Chandrawat boasted of killing 2,000 Muslims in Gujarat and said, "Have you forgotten Godhra? You killed 56, we sent 2,000 to the graveyard. We—this same Hindu community—shoved [their corpses] underground."
- On Mob lynchings, he said: "Why just cows, taking law into one's own hand, violence, destroying property for any reason are totally unacceptable." In 2015, the RSS chief called the lynching of Mohammed Akhlaq in Dadri a "small episode" that cannot damage "Hindu culture". After another Muslim man, Rakbar Khan, was lynched in Alwar over suspicion of cow

slaughter, RSS leader Indresh Kumar remarked that lynchings would stop if people stopped eating cow meat and protected them instead.

- On conversions, Mohan Bhagwat said, “If all religions are equal, then what is the need for conversion?” And he added, “Gods cannot be sold in markets or forcefully worshipped, hence forceful conversions must stop.” In 2014, according to India Today, an offshoot of the RSS claimed to have converted at least 57 Muslim families to Hinduism at a Purkhon ki ghar vapsi ceremony in Uttar Pradesh's Agra district.
- On gender equality, Mohan Bhagwat said, “Women are also coming out in the field and working equally with men and they must do that. So, we need to ensure they are secure. Hence, empowerment of both men and women are needed.” The sarsanghchalak himself has been in the eye of a storm for his controversial remarks on women and rape. In 2013, he blamed western culture for incidents of crimes against women.
- On the RSS' role during freedom struggle, Mohan Bhagwat went ballistic and said: “When the Congress passed the resolution for Purna Swaraj [complete independence], Doctor Saheb [Hegdewar] issued a circular asking all [RSS] shakhas to march past with the tricolour.”

RSS and Freedom Struggles

All pretensions notwithstanding, it is an open secret that the RSS is averse to the concept of freedom as expounded by JP. But the ideologues of the RSS clan are working overtime

to create a narrative of the RSS's participation in India's anti-colonial freedom struggle. This project got impetus after the electoral victory in 2014 of the RSS / BJP (which was celebrated as the return of Hindu rule after 1,000 years). But there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary and a lot has been written and spoken on the subject. The fact is that the RSS did not participate in the first freedom struggle and, in fact, had colluded with the British in perpetuating the colonial rule!

What we should be concerned with now is the role played by the RSS in the second freedom struggle—the JP Movement, the Emergency and after. The fact is that the Emergency rendered the Jana Sangh, the BJP's predecessor, respectable and paved the way for it to enter the mainstream of Indian politics. Indeed, RSS literature describes the Emergency as the "second freedom struggle", with the Sangh at the head of it. The struggle of others in opposing the Emergency, in this account, was incidental; it was the RSS that saved democracy, it claims. The role of peoples' movements is erased here; the Sangh itself is the people.

The reality is that the RSS and its flock in the BJP have no locus standi to make such claims about Emergency, because its own leaders groveled before the Congress dispensation to win reprieves from jail terms and have the ban lifted on their organisation.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's imposition of the Emergency was no mere mistake; it was a sin, a constitutional crime committed for purely personal reasons, namely, to nullify the judgment of the Allahabad High Court of June 12, 1975 declaring her election

to the Lok Sabha to be void. She put her political opponents behind bars, imposed press censorship, suspended fundamental rights, extended the life of the Lok Sabha, rushed through the Parliament the 42nd Constitutional amendment to undermine our democracy, attempted to give herself immunity from criminal proceedings, nullified the High Court judgment, and even made serious moves to discard the Constitution itself by convening a Constituent Assembly to establish a presidential system.

But, in his correspondence with Indira Gandhi during the Emergency, the RSS boss, Balasaheb Deoras, never criticised these sordid moves nor called for a return to the democratic order. Instead, on his advice and instructions, his men from the RSS gave unconditional undertakings to get out of prison. The government prepared a standard form which RSS detenus happily signed. Some of them did not wait for the form. They gave unqualified undertakings in their own language, if only to get out.

The Government's draft “pro-forma undertaking” read thus:

I, Shri..... Detenu Class I..... prisoner agree on affidavit that in case of my release I shall not do anything which is detrimental to internal security and public peace. Similarly, I shall not do anything which would hamper the distribution of essential goods. So also, I shall not participate in any illegal activities. I shall not indulge in any activities which is prejudicial to the present emergency.

The RSS men did not opt for prison. They were thrown into prison. The Emergency was declared on June 25, 1975. Deoras was arrested and put into prison on June

30. The RSS was banned, along with 23 other bodies, on July 4. The RSS' initial response was to wait and watch. Then they decided to compromise. Accordingly, Deoras began shooting off letters to Indira Gandhi, S.B. Chavan, Chief Minister of Maharashtra, and the 'Sarkari Sant' Vinoba Bhave. These letters, along with letters by others, were placed on the table of the Maharashtra Assembly by Chavan.

The very first para of Deoras' first letter to Indira Gandhi, dated August 22, 1975, read: "I have heard the speech you delivered on August 15, 1975, from the Red Fort, Delhi on A.I.R. The speech was balanced and befitting to the occasion and has prompted me to write this letter to you." Unctuous and false, as ever.

"The aim of the RSS is to unify and organise Hindu society. . . . There are people who allege that RSS is a communal organisation. This also is a baseless charge. Although at present the activities of the Sangh are confined to the Hindu society, the Sangh never preaches anything against any non-Hindu. It is absolutely wrong that the Sangh is anti-Muslim. We don't even use an improper word regarding Islam, Mohammad, Kuran, Christianity, Christ or the Bible." M.S. Golwalkar's books *We or Our Nationhood Defined* and *Bunch of Thoughts* expose the falsity of the denial.

The concluding para of Deoras' letter read: "I request you to please reconsider the case of the Sangh without any prejudice. In the light of the democratic right of freedom to organise, I beseech you to rescind the ban imposed upon the RSS." And no more. Not a word about lifting the Emergency or releasing others from prisons.

This letter, indeed, the entire correspondence, was conducted behind the back of the members of the Lok Sangarsh Samiti, with whom the RSS and its pointsman, Nanaji Deshmukh, were associated. They were all stabbed in the back by the RSS' cowardly betrayal. Indira Gandhi ignored him and his letters. Deoras' first letter to S.B. Chavan, dated July 15, 1975, said: "The Sangh has done nothing against the government or society even remotely. There is no place for such things in the Sangh's programme. The Sangh is engaged only in social and cultural activities."

Former Intelligence Bureau chief T.V. Rajeswar has claimed that the RSS had supported the Emergency and the then Sangh chief Balasaheb Deoras had tried to establish contact with Indira Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi.

I am myself privy to such surrenders and apologies. RSS activists detained in Chandigarh were only a handful and all of them except one gave apology letters requesting for pardon and release. Needless to say, these requests were rejected. When I told JP that many RSS / Jan Sangh activists detained under MISA were tendering unconditional apology and were resigning from their party in order to get released, he just called them traitors.

As against the letters of surrender by 'RSS-nationalists' to the Emergency regime, this is a brief extract from the letter JP wrote from jail to Indira Gandhi on 21 July, 1975:

You know I am an old man. My life's work is done. And after Prabha's going I have nothing and no one to live for. . . I have given all my life, after finishing education, to

the country and asked for nothing in return. So, I shall be content to die a prisoner under your regime . . .

Would you listen to the advise of such a man? Please do not destroy the foundation that the Fathers of the Nation, including your own noble father, had laid down. There is nothing but strife and suffering along the path that you have taken. You inherited a great tradition, noble values and a great democracy. Do not leave behind a miserable wreck of all that. It would take long time to put that all together again. For it would be put together again I have no doubt. A people who fought British imperialism and humbled it cannot accept the indignity and shame of totalitarianism.

The spirit of man can never be vanquished, no matter how deeply suppressed. In establishing your personal dictatorship, you have buried it deep. But it will rise from the grave . . .

While 73-year old JP, despite his poor health, refused to ask for parole, defied the Emergency and struggled to make India free, a bulk of the RSS 'sevak's' were prostrating and surrendering before the Imperial Indira. There were also reports that some top brasses of the RSS were in cohort with Sanjay Gandhi, the real Emergency master trying to run a fascist state! Such an entity whom JP called 'traitors' claim that they fought the Emergency and were the ones to win India's Second Freedom struggle! What a nerve!

Spectre of Fascism

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The American Economy is Rigged

Joseph E. Stiglitz

The US Census Bureau recently released 2017 statistics which showed that almost 45 million Americans are living in poverty and 28 million do not have healthcare.

Americans are used to thinking that their nation is special. In many ways, it is: the US has by far the most Nobel Prize winners, the largest defense expenditures (almost equal to the next 10 or so countries put together) and the most billionaires (twice as many as China, the closest competitor). But some examples of American Exceptionalism should not make us proud. By most accounts, the US has the highest level of economic inequality among developed countries. It has the world's greatest per capita health expenditures yet the lowest life expectancy among comparable countries. It is also one of a few developed countries jostling for the dubious distinction of having the lowest measures of equality of opportunity.

The notion of the American Dream—that, unlike old Europe, we are a land of opportunity—is part of our essence. Yet the numbers say otherwise. The life prospects of a young American depend more on the income and education of his or her parents than in almost any other advanced country. When poor-boy-makes-good anecdotes get passed around in the media, that is precisely because such stories are so rare.

Things appear to be getting worse, partly as a result of forces, such as technology and globalisation, that seem beyond our control, but most disturbingly because of those

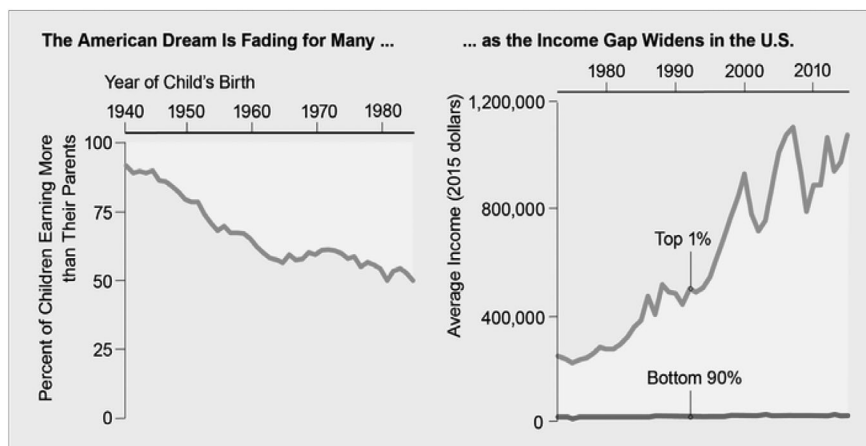
within our command. It is not the laws of nature that have led to this dire situation: it is the laws of humankind. Markets do not exist in a vacuum: they are shaped by rules and regulations, which can be designed to favor one group over another. President Donald Trump was right in saying that the system is rigged—by those in the inherited plutocracy of which he himself is a member. And he is making it much, much worse.

America has long outdone others in its level of inequality, but in the past 40 years it has reached new heights. Whereas the income share of the top 0.1 percent has more than quadrupled and that of the top 1 percent has almost doubled, that of the bottom 90 percent has declined. Wages at the bottom, adjusted for inflation, are about the same as they were some 60 years ago! In fact, for those with a high school education or less, incomes have fallen over recent decades. Males have been particularly hard hit, as the US has moved away from manufacturing industries into an economy based on services.

Deaths of Despair

Wealth is even less equally distributed, with just three Americans having as much as the bottom 50 percent—testimony to how much money there is at the top and how little there is at the bottom. Families in the bottom 50 percent hardly have the cash reserves to meet an emergency. Newspapers are replete with stories of those for whom the breakdown of a car or an illness starts a downward spiral from which they never recover.

In significant part because of high inequality, US life expectancy, exceptionally low to begin with, is experiencing sustained declines. This in spite of the marvels of medical science, many advances of which occur right here in America and which are made readily available to the rich. Economist Ann Case and 2015 Nobel laureate in economics Angus Deaton describe one of the main causes of rising morbidity—the increase in alcoholism, drug overdoses and suicides—as “deaths of despair” by those who have given up hope.



Defenders of America's inequality have a pat explanation. They refer to the workings of a competitive market, where the laws of supply and demand determine wages, prices and even interest rates—a mechanical system, much like that describing the physical universe. Those with scarce assets or skills are amply rewarded, they argue, because of the larger contributions they make to the economy. What they get merely represents what they have contributed. Often they take out less than they contributed, so what is left over for the rest is that much more.

This fictional narrative may at one time have assuaged the guilt of those at the top and persuaded everyone else to accept this sorry state of affairs. Perhaps the defining moment exposing the lie was the 2008 financial crisis, when the bankers who brought the global economy to the brink of ruin with predatory lending, market manipulation and various other anti-social practices walked away with millions of dollars in bonuses just as millions of Americans lost their jobs and homes and tens of millions more worldwide suffered on their account. Virtually none of these bankers were ever held to account for their misdeeds.

I became aware of the fantastical nature of this narrative as a schoolboy, when I thought of the wealth of the plantation owners, built on the backs of slaves. At the time of the Civil War, the market value of the slaves in the South was approximately half of the region's total wealth, including the value of the land and the physical capital—the factories and equipment. The wealth of at least this part of this nation was not based on industry, innovation and commerce but rather on exploitation.

Today we have replaced this open exploitation with more insidious forms, which have intensified since the Reagan–Thatcher revolution of the 1980s. This exploitation, I will argue, is largely to blame for the escalating inequality in the US

After the New Deal of the 1930s, American inequality went into decline. By the 1950s inequality had receded to such an extent that another Nobel laureate in economics, Simon Kuznets, formulated what came to be called Kuznets's law. In the early stages of development, as some parts of a country seize new opportunities, inequalities grow, he postulated; in the later stages, they shrink. The theory long fit the data—but then, around the early 1980s, the trend abruptly reversed.

Explaining Inequality

Economists have put forward a range of explanations for why inequality has in fact been increasing in many developed countries. Some argue that advances in technology have spurred the demand for skilled labor relative to unskilled labor, thereby depressing the wages of the latter. Yet that alone cannot explain why even skilled labor has done so poorly over the past two decades, why average wages have done so badly and why matters are so much worse in the US than in other developed nations. Changes in technology are global and should affect all advanced economies in the same way. Other economists blame globalisation itself, which has weakened the power of workers. Firms can and do move abroad unless demands for higher wages are curtailed. But again, globalisation has been integral to all advanced economies. Why is its impact so much worse in the US?

The shift from a manufacturing

to a service-based economy is partly to blame. At its extreme—a firm of one person—the service economy is a winner-takes-all system. A movie star makes millions, for example, whereas most actors make a pittance. Overall, wages are likely to be far more widely dispersed in a service economy than in one based on manufacturing, so the transition contributes to greater inequality. This fact does not explain, however, why the average wage has not improved for decades. Moreover, the shift to the service sector is happening in most other advanced countries: Why are matters so much worse in the US?

Again, because services are often provided locally, firms have more market power: the ability to raise prices above what would prevail in a competitive market. A small town in rural America may have only one authorised Toyota repair shop, which virtually every Toyota owner is forced to patronise. The providers of these local services can raise prices over costs, increasing their profits and the share of income going to owners and managers. This, too, increases inequality. But again, why is US inequality practically unique?

In his celebrated 2013 *treatise Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, French economist Thomas Piketty shifts the gaze to capitalists. He suggests that the few who own much of a country's capital save so much that, given the stable and high return to capital (relative to the growth rate of the economy), their share of the national income has been increasing. His theory has, however, been questioned on many grounds. For instance, the savings rate of even the rich in the US is so low, compared with the rich in other countries, that the increase in inequality should be lower here, not greater.

An alternative theory is far more consonant with the facts. Since the mid-1970s the rules of the economic game have been rewritten, both globally and nationally, in ways that advantage the rich and disadvantage the rest. And they have been rewritten further in this perverse direction in the US than in other developed countries—even though the rules in the US were already less favorable to workers. From this perspective, increasing inequality is a matter of choice: a consequence of our policies, laws and regulations.

In the US, the market power of large corporations, which was greater than in most other advanced countries to begin with, has increased even more than elsewhere. On the other hand, the market power of workers, which started out less than in most other advanced countries, has fallen further than elsewhere. This is not only because of the shift to a service-sector economy—it is because of the rigged rules of the game, rules set in a political system that is itself rigged through gerrymandering, voter suppression and the influence of money. A vicious spiral has formed: economic inequality translates into political inequality, which leads to rules that favor the wealthy, which in turn reinforces economic inequality.

Feedback Loop

Political scientists have documented the ways in which money influences politics in certain political systems, converting higher economic inequality into greater political inequality. Political inequality, in its turn, gives rise to more economic inequality as the rich use their political power to shape the rules of the game in ways that favor them—for instance, by softening

anti-trust laws and weakening unions. Using mathematical models, economists such as myself have shown that this two-way feedback loop between money and regulations leads to at least two stable points. If an economy starts out with lower inequality, the political system generates rules that sustain it, leading to one equilibrium situation. The American system is the other equilibrium—and will continue to be unless there is a democratic political awakening.

An account of how the rules have been shaped must begin with anti-trust laws, first enacted 128 years ago in the US to prevent the agglomeration of market power. Their enforcement has weakened—at a time when, if anything, the laws themselves should have been strengthened. Technological changes have concentrated market power in the hands of a few global players, in part because of so-called network effects: you are far more likely to join a particular social network or use a certain word processor if everyone you know is already using it. Once established, a firm such as Facebook or Microsoft is hard to dislodge. Moreover, fixed costs, such as that of developing a piece of software, have increased as compared with marginal costs—that of duplicating the software. A new entrant has to bear all these fixed costs up front, and if it does enter, the rich incumbent can respond by lowering prices drastically. The cost of making an additional e-book or photo-editing program is essentially zero.

In short, entry is hard and risky, which gives established firms with deep war chests enormous power to crush competitors and ultimately raise prices. Making matters worse, US firms have been

innovative not only in the products they make but in thinking of ways to extend and amplify their market power. The European Commission has imposed fines of billions of dollars on Microsoft and Google and ordered them to stop their anti-competitive practices (such as Google privileging its own comparison shopping service). In the US, we have done too little to control concentrations of market power, so it is not a surprise that it has increased in many sectors.

Rigged rules also explain why the impact of globalisation may have been worse in the US. A concerted attack on unions has almost halved the fraction of unionised workers in the nation, to about 11 percent. (In Scandinavia, it is roughly 70 percent.) Weaker unions provide workers less protection against the efforts of firms to drive down wages or worsen working conditions. Moreover, US investment treaties such as the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement—treaties that were sold as a way of preventing foreign countries from discriminating against American firms—also protect investors against a tightening of environmental and health regulations abroad. For instance, they enable corporations to sue nations in private international arbitration panels for passing laws that protect citizens and the environment but threaten the multinational company's bottom line. Firms like these provisions, which enhance the credibility of a company's threat to move abroad if workers do not temper their demands. In short, these investment agreements weaken US workers' bargaining power even further.

Liberated Finance

Many other changes to our norms, laws, rules and regulations

have contributed to inequality. Weak corporate governance laws have allowed chief executives in the US to compensate themselves 361 times more than the average worker, far more than in other developed countries. Financial liberalisation—the stripping away of regulations designed to prevent the financial sector from imposing harms, such as the 2008 economic crisis, on the rest of society—has enabled the finance industry to grow in size and profitability and has increased its opportunities to exploit everyone else. Banks routinely indulge in practices that are legal but should not be, such as imposing usurious interest rates on borrowers or exorbitant fees on merchants for credit and debit cards and creating securities that are designed to fail. They also frequently do things that are illegal, including market manipulation and insider trading. In all of this, the financial sector has moved money away from ordinary Americans to rich bankers and the banks' shareholders. This redistribution of wealth is an important contributor to American inequality.

Other means of so-called rent extraction—the withdrawal of income from the national pie that is incommensurate with societal contribution—abound. For example, a legal provision enacted in 2003 prohibited the government from negotiating drug prices for Medicare—a gift of some \$50 billion a year or more to the pharmaceutical industry. Special favours, such as extractive industries' obtaining public resources such as oil at below fair-market value or banks' getting funds from the Federal Reserve at near-zero interest rates (which they relend at high interest rates), also amount to rent extraction. Further

exacerbating inequality is favorable tax treatment for the rich. In the US, those at the top pay a smaller fraction of their income in taxes than those who are much poorer—a form of largesse that the Trump administration has just worsened with the 2017 tax bill.

Some economists have argued that we can lessen inequality only by giving up on growth and efficiency. But recent research, such as work done by Jonathan Ostry and others at the International Monetary Fund, suggests that economies with greater equality perform better, with higher growth, better average standards of living and greater stability. Inequality in the extremes observed in the US and in the manner generated there actually damages the economy. The exploitation of market power and the variety of other distortions I have described, for instance, makes markets less efficient, leading to underproduction of valuable goods such as basic research and overproduction of others, such as exploitative financial products.

Moreover, because the rich typically spend a smaller fraction of their income on consumption than the poor, total or “aggregate” demand in countries with higher inequality is weaker. Societies could make up for this gap by increasing government spending—on infrastructure, education and health, for instance, all of which are investments necessary for long-term growth. But the politics of unequal societies typically puts the burden on monetary policy: interest rates are lowered to stimulate spending. Artificially low interest rates, especially if coupled with inadequate financial market regulation, often give rise to bubbles, which is what happened with the 2008 housing crisis.

It is no surprise that, on average, people living in unequal societies have less equality of opportunity: those at the bottom never get the education that would enable them to live up to their potential. This fact, in turn, exacerbates inequality while wasting the country's most valuable resource: Americans themselves.

Restoring Justice

Morale is lower in unequal societies, especially when inequality is seen as unjust, and the feeling of being used or cheated leads to lower productivity. When those who run gambling casinos or bankers suffering from moral turpitude make a zillion times more than the scientists and inventors who brought us lasers, transistors and an understanding of DNA, it is clear that something is wrong. Then again, the children of the rich come to think of themselves as a class apart, entitled to their good fortune, and accordingly more likely to break the rules necessary for making society function. All of this contributes to a breakdown of trust, with its attendant impact on social cohesion and economic performance.

There is no magic bullet to remedy a problem as deep-rooted as America's inequality. Its origins are largely political, so it is hard to imagine meaningful change without a concerted effort to take money out of politics—through, for instance, campaign finance reform. Blocking the revolving doors by which regulators and other government officials come from and return to the same industries they regulate and work with is also essential.

Beyond that, we need more progressive taxation and high-quality federally funded public education, including affordable access to universities for all, no

ruinous loans required. We need modern competition laws to deal with the problems posed by 21st-century market power and stronger enforcement of the laws we do have. We need labor laws that protect workers and their rights to unionise. We need corporate governance laws that curb exorbitant salaries bestowed on chief executives, and we need stronger financial regulations that will prevent banks from engaging in the exploitative practices that have become their hallmark. We need better enforcement of antidiscrimination laws: it is unconscionable that women and minorities get paid a mere fraction of what their white male counterparts receive. We also need more sensible inheritance laws that will reduce the intergenerational transmission of advantage and disadvantage.

The basic perquisites of a middle-class life, including a secure old age, are no longer attainable for most Americans. We need to guarantee access to health care. We need to strengthen and reform retirement programs, which have put an increasing burden of risk management on workers (who are expected to manage their portfolios to guard simultaneously against the risks of inflation and market collapse) and opened them up to exploitation by our financial sector (which sells them products designed to maximise bank fees rather than retirement security). Our mortgage system was our Achilles' heel, and we have not really fixed it. With such a large fraction of Americans living in cities, we have to have urban housing policies that ensure affordable housing for all.

It is a long agenda—but a doable one. When skeptics say it is nice but not affordable, I reply: We cannot

afford to not do these things. We are already paying a high price for inequality, but it is just a down payment on what we will have to pay if we do not do something—and quickly. It is not just our economy that is at stake; we are risking our democracy.

As more of our citizens come to understand why the fruits of

economic progress have been so unequally shared, there is a real danger that they will become open to a demagogue blaming the country's problems on others and making false promises of rectifying “a rigged system.” We are already experiencing a foretaste of what might happen. It could get much worse.

Socialism frightens Trump

Martin Varese, Michael Blosser

The White House's Council of Economic Advisers (CEA) released a report towards the end of October 2018 on “The Opportunity Costs of Socialism,” apparently based on the fact that “coincident with the 200th anniversary of Karl Marx's birth, socialism is making a comeback in American political discourse,” even though Marx's birth was in May (1818).

Reading through the report, it becomes abundantly clear that the Trump administration is afraid of this “comeback” of socialism in the US, as more left-leaning and self-proclaimed politicians are gaining space in the country's politics.

The Democratic Socialists of America has grown to more than 50,000 members, with socialist policies such as universal healthcare, free education and taxes on the rich and corporations now being supported by the majority of the US population. The study equates this rise of socialism to the 200th anniversary of Marx; however, it conveniently “forgets” to mention the rise of fascism and discriminatory politics, ascendent since the electoral triumph of Donald Trump in November 2016.

This “coincidental” report was published just before November's midterm elections, at a time when

progressive candidates are rising in the polls and gaining popularity with more people. The CEA thought it would be a good idea to use tactics from the 1950s when the “red scare” and the “witch hunt” against communism and communists were a horrifying reality during McCarthyism.

The report comes weeks before the elections, and weeks after a new study from the Pew Research Center unveiled that “six-in-ten Americans say it is the federal government's responsibility to make sure all Americans have health care coverage, including 31% who support a ‘single payer’ approach to health insurance.” Whereas 30 percent of voters believe that health care is the “most important” issue, followed by jobs and economy with 21 percent, while both immigration and gun policy are at 15 percent.

Republicans, represented by the Trump administration and the White House, are trying to minimise the rise of the “self-declared socialists (that) are gaining support in Congress and among much of the electorate,” which really explains the sole purpose of the CEA's report.

The words of Democratic congressional candidate Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez given in August seem to be more appropriate now

than ever:

Why is it that our pockets are only empty when it comes to education and health care for our kids? Why are our pockets only empty when we talk about 100 percent renewable energy that is going to save this planet and allow our children to thrive, (but) we write unlimited blank checks for war. We just wrote a US\$2 trillion check for that GOP tax cut and nobody asked those folks how they are going to pay for it.

This report tries to cloak itself in an allegedly “academic” aura, and is essentially based on Milton Friedman’s economic system, an extremist free market and minimal intervention policy. Friedman’s thesis promotes the dismantling of public services like firefighters, police, libraries, schools, hospitals, or anything else that can save or help people that can’t afford it. The benefits go to a rich minority in society, to the detriment of the masses.

The report first talks about countries like Cuba, calling them “nondemocratic governments” and rapidly discrediting them for “substantially less food production and tens of millions of deaths by starvation.”

The authors of this report conveniently fail to mention US involvement in the murderous 60-year US-backed blockade imposed on the island, and of course, they refuse to mention the various achievements that the Cuban Revolution has accomplished. A 99-percent literacy rate, free education from elementary school through university, universal health care praised by the United Nations, and one of the lowest infant mortality rates in the world. All of these achievements despite the genocidal US blockade that has cost the island \$134.5 billion over six decades.

The CEA report wants people to think that Cuba has no freedom, which isn’t actually true. Not only is there a solid democracy in Cuba, but also the basic needs of the country’s population are satisfied. “To many, freedom is an absence of worry. The desire and need for a social fabric knit well to support the basic prerequisites: food, shelter, health and education. None of them are a charity, because they are an investment in the fundamental source of a society’s well-being: human capital,” wrote Dr. Arshad M. Khan in 2017.

The report later takes on Venezuela, a country with “highly socialist policies (that) are peacefully implemented under the auspices of democracy,” to try and debunk the Bolivarian Revolution specifically, and generally the “XXI Century Socialism” or “National and Popular Projects” of the Latin American countries. “These countries are examples of a more general pattern of socialism’s negative output effects,” reads the report.

However, it also conveniently leaves out a staggering number of facts. First, it omits yet another murderous blockade and economic war waged by the US against Venezuela; the same Venezuela that has built over two million houses for the poor, and who, with Cuba’s help, gave medical care to people who had never seen a doctor in their life; the same Venezuela that managed to redistribute for the sake of wellness and raise millions out of poverty.

The report also erases Bolivia, a country that has democratically and independently achieved the highest economic growth rate in South America. Under the first indigenous President Evo Morales, the country instituted a series of economic and social reforms that encapsulated and faithfully executed theories of 21st Century Socialism; a different way

of facing Latin America’s problems; and the path farthest away from the neoliberalism practiced and praised by Friedman and implemented in other parts of Latin America by his apprentices, “the Chicago Boys.”

With sovereign initiatives enacted by President Evo Morales, Bolivia’s socio-economic model used income from export resources to diversify the economy, created social programs aimed at redistributing riches, and reduced poverty over the last decade.

The report also neglects to mention Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Colombia and Mexico, countries currently suffering under governments that unequivocally follow neoliberal recipes mainly backed by the US and enforced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

These right-wing governments lay the foundation for their economic model in inequality, disguised in free-market policies, and the idea that the state must not intervene—exactly the opposite of those qualities the CEA’s defines as “socialism.” Similarly, during the “golden” decade of neoliberalism in Latin America in the 90s, in which right-wing governments implemented Structural Adjustment Programs by the IMF and the World Bank and followed the wishes of their US and Western European capitalist masters, the region became one of the poorest and most unequal in the world and also demonstrated poor or negative economic growth.

Latin America has shown to the world, during more or less the past decade, that socialism can work and indeed, works better than capitalism. During the past few years (depending on which country we are talking about) the return of neoliberalism has brought back crisis, poverty, and inequality to the region.



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Rebellious Scientists Issue Urgent Appeal

Robert Hunziker, Alex Kirby

On October 31, 2018, a select group of UK scientists launched a Declaration of Rebellion against the UK government at the Houses of Parliament: "For criminal inaction in the face of climate change catastrophe and ecological collapse."

According to the scientists, now is the time to act as a planetary emergency is already upon us.

Nearly 100 British scientists, academics and writers are willing to go to jail to make their point that anthropogenic (human-caused) climate change is a surefire provocateur that's already starting to decimate ecosystems.

Additionally, these scientists also launched *ExtinctionRebellion*, an international movement that will use mass civil disobedience to force governments to immediately establish a WWII-type effort to fight climate change.

Yes, civil disobedience is the way forward, as the group promises: "Repeated acts of disruptive, non-violent civil disobedience" if the government does not respond seriously to demands, and they anticipate "there will be mass arrests".

Similar in tone to early American

rebels like "Give me Liberty or Give me Death" Patrick Henry of American Revolution circa late 18th century, these rebel scientists are willing to make personal sacrifices, to be arrested, to go to prison, as they firmly believe it's proper to start a planetary emergency global effort in the UK where the industrial revolution commenced. Essentially, full circle back to the beginnings of the fossil fuel era.

According to *Extinction Rebellion* the sixth mass extinction is already strutting its mettle in spunky fashion. For example, a recent Worldwide Fund for Nature report claims a wipeout of 60% of animal populations has already occurred over the past 50 years alone.

All of which begs the provocative question: What does it imply for the next 50 years as climate change / global warming indicators firmly crank up to rapid-acceleration mode, in some cases exponentially? Thus, the next 50 yrs zoom-zoom will be supercharged. What then?

For example, an extremely alarming new study, 'Climate-Driven Declines in Arthropod Abundance Restructure a Rainforest Food Web', *Proceedings of the*

National Academy of Sciences, reveals a mind-boggling cataclysmic falloff, up to 60-fold, of the “food web” in tropical rainforests with temps up 2.0-to-2.5°C over baseline, indicative of an ecosystem in early stages of disintegration.

A falloff of “up to 60-fold” is extremely difficult to fathom. It’s almost like an out of body experience from far above, watching rainforests, over time, crumble into thousands of piles of grey dust in a dark nightmarish dream sequence.

The climate is changing much faster than nature normally functions because human-charged climate change works against the regular flow of nature, leaving it choking / gasping / disintegrating in the dust.

Ecosystems from the Arctic to Antarctica are starting to crumble right before our eyes, but nobody lives where it happens. So, nobody sees it first-hand, as for example:

- Vavilov Ice Cap (700 sq. miles) in the Russian High Arctic slipping / sliding by 15–35 feet per day versus normally 2 inches per day—a real shocker.
- Three 100-year droughts (which normally happen once every 100 years) hit the Amazon Rainforest like clockwork over the past 10 years: 2005–2010–2015—an unprecedented occurrence.
- The Totten Glacier (16 feet of water), which comprises less than 1/10th of East Antarctica’s ice mass, is destabilising 100-years ahead of previous climate modeling.
- West Antarctica’s rate of ice loss triples over 15 years, way ahead of scientific modeling.
- Arctic multi-year thick ice infrastructure melts, losing Northern Hemisphere’s

biggest reflector of sunlight, exposing subsea permafrost methane trapped over the eons in clathrates, thus risking runaway global warming with concomitant wipeout of mid-latitude agricultural crops.

- The entire surface of Greenland (22 feet of water) turned to slush, freaking-out scientists.
- China’s Lancang River (1,330 miles in China), the Danube of the East, lost 70% of its headwater glaciers to global warming, threatening an irregular flow of this major river for all of SE Asia sometime in the distant future.
- The World Bank warns that 100 million people are at risk of loss of irrigation, drinking water and hydropower because of rapid melt of Andes’ glacial water towers.
- Pingos imploding in Siberia, spewing methane; 7,000 Pingos identified, as Siberia enters ecosystem collapse phase.
- Alaskan permafrost emitting 220 million tons of carbon every 2 years as it reverses from carbon sink to a carbon emitter. Ouch!
- Too much heat and CO2 are changing ocean chemistry, as acidification disrupts the base of the food web; Pteropod reproduction and/or development threatened.
- One-half of the Great Barrier Reef killed by excessively heated ocean water conditions 2016–17—scientists flabbergasted.
- Ocean plankton production off by 40% past 50 years, diminishing oxygen production.
- Thermohaline worldwide ocean circulation slowest in 1,600 years has negative worldwide impact.

- Underwater kelp forests decimated all along California northern coasts and Australia’s giant kelp forest declared “endangered ecological zone,” as a steady increase in ocean temps by nearly 3 degrees Fahrenheit in recent decades was all it took.
- Colorado River Basin water flow down 40% in worst drought in 1,200 years, threatening major cities and agriculture.
- Middle East / Northern Africa Mediterranean coastlines drying up faster than anywhere on the planet because of global warming. Where will eco migrants go next?
- One hundred nature reserves in Europe experienced 80% drop in flying insect abundance, confusing scientists.
- NOAA says CO2 increasing 100 times faster than end of last Ice Age, which is hyper-speed in geological time.

Signatories to the Declaration of Rebellion include established names in academics like Professor Danny Dorling of University of Oxford and Dr. Ian Gibson, former chair of Parliamentary Science and Technology Select Committee. Green Party MP Caroline Lucas is also a signatory. Other backers are probably better-known for their achievements beyond science, including the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, now the Master of Magdalene College at the University of Cambridge, and the journalist George Monbiot.

Cry of desperation

Another supporter is Andrew Simms of the New Weather Institute. In an interview, he stated: “This is almost a cry of desperation. People

are bewildered. But almost every profound change in British society, from the abolition of slavery to the improvement of shipping safety, has involved people risking arrest.

“The signs I am getting from the UK government now are that it is a reckless administration putting its own people and others at risk by putting climate change virtually nowhere.

“The Declaration alone won’t bring about change: we’ll need people working practically to make change happen on the ground. But we need ExtinctionRebellion as part of the mosaic of responses to the extremely precarious situation we now find ourselves in.”

Simms, convinced that an entirely new potential for rapid societal change now exists, says: “We know what’s needed, and the resources to do it are there. ExtinctionRebellion is one example of how new ideas can spread quickly and rapid shift—and radical action—can come closer.”

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Activists’ Arrests: Govt Wants Only One Voice

Apoorvanand

The judicial custody of Arun Ferreira, Sudha Bhardwaj and Vernon Gonsalves has been extended till 19 November by the Pune sessions court. They were arrested by the Maharashtra police for allegedly planning large-scale violence in collaboration with the Communist Party of India (Maoist).

It again shows that the lower judiciary in our country can hardly be expected to stand for individual liberty and the right to dissent when the state says that it is threatened.

It was, therefore, a surprise when the Delhi High Court granted bail to Gautam Navlakha. Gautam has also got relief from the Bombay High Court, which has restrained the Pune Police from arresting him, Anand Teltumbde and Stan Swamy till 21 November.

The Pune Police made an explosive claim that it has also uncovered a conspiracy to assassinate the Prime Minister and suspects a large nationwide network secretly working for it.

The Brazenness of the State

The absurdity of these discoveries has since been discussed at length in the media.

But more than that, we need to admire the utter brazenness of the State, which has, through these raids and arrests, nearly buried the question of responsibility of the violence that took place after an event on the eve of New Year at Bhima-Koregaon.

It was alleged that it was planned and executed by some Hindutvavadi

groups. Instead of probing them, the Pune Police introduced an entirely new angle to the whole story, claiming that the event by the Dalits at Bhima-Koregaon was actually funded and supported by the Maoists, and was part of a larger design to create unrest in the country.

Though multiple raids across India on activists and intellectuals—openly active through their writing, speaking, and known for their record of standing up for the Dalits, tribals and the marginalised—an impression of a hidden network of Maoists was sought to be created. The Hindi media and a section of the electronic channels helped the government drive this theory deep into the popular mind.

The people were made to believe in the fiction of gangs of nation-breakers being sheltered by universities like JNU and Hyderabad Central University by a helping media. That narrative has now been made more sensational by adding this new element of ‘anti-national, violent’ Maoists active in our backyards.

It was not a coincidence that the outfits affiliated to the BJP and the RSS launched a campaign at the Delhi University a year ago to free the campus from red terror. Meetings and seminars are being held across India to enlighten people about the threat of dangerous Maoists masquerading as teachers, students, artists, filmmakers, etc.

It is said that the very openness of the urban spaces is being misused by the Maoists to further their

agenda. A high-decibel campaign supported by the ministers of the central government is bound to impact the people who have no other channel of getting information than the Hindi newspapers and popular TV channels like the Zee TV.

A nationalist narrative is being woven by them in which the State is made one with the nation. And the government is the sole carrier of this nationalism. Any criticism of the government automatically turns into an attack on the State and the nation.

The Great Confusion among People

It is only 10 months and all of us have forgotten about the violence against the participants of the Bhima-Koregaon event.

Instead, we are busy discussing whether the arrested or raided activists are Maoists or not.

It looks absurd but it remains a reality that in the popular imagination, Maoists are seen as dangerous terrorists armed to their teeth and flushed with funds. They are funding Kanhaiya Kumar, Umar Khalid, and everyone who is doing something that is critical of the policies and actions of this government. When the writers and artists started their protest by returning State awards, the finance minister suggested that they were being funded by anti-nationals.

There are different kinds of activists working all over India. Some of them are openly sympathetic to the Maoist ideology and there are others who, even when differing or disagreeing with the Maoists, would defend their human rights as a matter of principle. It does not mean that they indulge in or support violent acts.

But the government has created

a great confusion in the minds of the people. It is bizarre but even the Congress party is portrayed as conspiring with the Maoists or Naxals, since Rahul Gandhi chose to speak against the attack on student leaders like Kanhaiya or criticised the recent raids and the arrests of these activists.

There is no use talking about the significance of the work people like Anand Teltumbde, Stan Swamy, Sudha Bharadwaj or others are doing. The design to club different kinds of people together needs to be understood.

We must recall the warning the Prime Minister gave to the judges just after taking over. He had told them that their judgments should not be influenced by the perception created by the five-star activists. It

is important for this government to intimidate and silence this privileged and noisy class. The raids and arrests are part of this strategy.

A situation is being created in which the articulate section of the society, which keeps disturbing the nationalist narrative of the government, would just disappear.

The meaning of these arrests would be clear if we put them together with the attempt to take away from the University academics the right to speak and write freely, to disallow non-State views to be aired on campuses.

The objective is to let only one voice get echoed from all corners. What is disturbing is that most of us don't find it disturbing at all.

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The Way Forward for Socialists in Brazil

Claudia Fanti interviews Joao Stedile

The devastating victory of extreme right-wing candidate Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil's presidential elections on October 28 left many across the world shocked and wondering how someone who openly preaches hate and violence could have won. Claudia Fanti, an Italian journalist, spoke to João Pedro Stedile of the national board of the Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST) about the elections and the way forward for the left in Brazil.

How is it possible that millions of Brazilians voted for an openly fascist project? Does the manipulation of data and fake news through WhatsApp explain what happened?

We suffered an electoral defeat as progressive and people's forces. This does not mean that the majority of people chose fascism. Bolsonaro received 56 million votes, Haddad 45 million, and 31 million did not vote or they cast a blank ballot. On the other hand, the country is divided. In the north and north-east we elected 12 governors, which is an area that will serve as our trenches, geographically. In the last week, a national coordination was formed with intellectuals, musicians, teachers, churches, pastors, progressives, in defense of democracy, that will remain as a bastion of society.

We lost electorally because the Brazilian capitalist class, dominated

by finance capital and transnational companies, abandoned the Macron formula and opted for the Pinochet method. They propose a repressive government, with fascist methods, and with no state presence in the economy with ultra-neoliberalism. They put all of their economic weight and hegemony behind Bolsonaro. To win, they used bots and had support from outside Brazil, from Trump and Steve Bannon, in addition to the right-wing forces from Israel, to bombard the Brazilian people with systematic lies. It must not be forgotten that Brazil is the country in the world with most cell phones and the highest level of use of social media, with Whatsapp, Facebook, twitter, etc. They also were supported by a conservative network of evangelical pastors, and from the conservative sectors of the Catholic church.

They created an anti-PT, anti-left wing environment, as if we were the ones responsible for the crisis of capitalism.

On the other hand, they used the state apparatus in two ways: the principal and most fanatic militants of Bolsonaro were the military police, the people from the armed forces and members of the Stonemasons sect. They had a reach across the whole country. They also had the support of the judiciary, who since the coup against Dilma are loyal to the interests of capital. To give an idea, last week, the judicial authorised a search and arrest in 17 Brazilian universities.

They also used the judicial power to illegally prevent the possibility of Lula participating in the elections that he would've won in the first round.

Added to this was the organisational weaknesses of the left,

and its distancing from grassroots work and from the poorest and the working class in general.

Bolsonaro presented himself as an anti-system candidate although he had supported some of the worst measures of Temer? How did he do it?

Bolsonaro's campaign was based on lies and was a farce. He never once discussed a plan of government; he never wanted to participate in any debates on television or in other media. He hid behind a false image, of the courageous military man. He hid from the population that his government will be a government of military personnel, repressive, and one that would further the imposition of the interests of finance capital and the transnational companies. The only two ministers that he announced during the campaign were Paulo Guedes, a banker and a 'Chicago boy', for Economic Minister and the retention of the current president of the central bank, who is an Israeli citizen and defers to the interests of Itau bank.

Today the declarations of Steve Bannon have been all over the bourgeois news. He was the campaign coordinator of Trump and was behind Bolsonaro, which shows just how important this campaign was for the global right wing, with all of the new methods of mass manipulation through social media. Here, we are confronting the interests of the global right, which has transformed us into an electoral laboratory, to apply this formula in the rest of the world.

Was the electoral strategy of the Workers' Party (PT) correct? Could something else have been

done, something different?

Well, there is always a lot of analysis and hypothesis, and everyone has their own evaluation. I think that the PT was more prepared to do a campaign with Lula, who is the central leader of the masses in Brazil. With his imprisonment and his being barred from even speaking to the people, the right-wing took away our principle force. Then, there was a weakness in not realising the power and manipulation of the social networks, especially Whatsapp. They were sending messages from outside, millions of lies every half an hour. Imagine for example, that on the last day, they even spread the lie that Haddad was a pedophile . . . in the end, we lacked the will and time to do a campaign more linked to the people, to go house by house, a campaign that listened to the people.

In the PT, there were many people who trusted the power of the television, but they were proved wrong. The television is no longer a sufficient instrument to change an election.

Many say that it all started with the protests in June 2013. Following this came the many protests against the PT government, the illegitimate overthrow of Dilma, the persecution of Lula and finally, the unstoppable growth of Bolsonaro. If the PT had better understood the protest in June 2013, could history have been different?

Of course. However, behind all of this lies the strong and deep economic crisis of the capitalist way of functioning. When the economy grows, everyone can win. When the economy does not function, each class just wants to save itself. It is like what happened in the Titanic.

The first class, the capitalists, took the life boats to save themselves alone, and the second and third class passengers drowned. The Dilma government and the left-wing parties did not have the clarity, the capacity and the political will to explain to the people the nature of the crisis, the nature of the corruption, the nature of all of the problems. By not explaining this, the advantage shifted to the right-wing who had more ability to put all of the blame on the Dilma government, then on the PT and then on Lula.

What comes next is a war on labor rights, on the black and indigenous population, on the environment, on the MST and all of the social movements. What will be the strategy ahead for the movements?

We are still in the moment of evaluation, debates and preparing for the next period, that will be a long one.

We will have a right-wing, fascist, repressive government but without a classic movement of fascist masses like there was in Europe. This is why we say that there will be a government more similar to Pinochet and to that of Duterte in the Philippines. They defend an ultra-neoliberal program to save the banks and the transnational companies, including the Europeans who support them. At the same time, it has also been proven that neoliberalism, the minimal state and complete freedom for capital, will not resolve the fundamental problems of the people. We have 14 million unemployed people and another 33 million with precarious work. We have almost 60 million workers outside the economy, the people need jobs, income, housing,

school and land. In this respect, it will be a repressive government but the people will have to confront the contradictions and mobilise.

We do not have another option besides learning from the historical lessons in the struggle for humanity. First, we must organise a broad democratic front to confront this fascist government. We have a strong institutional base of opposition with 12 governors and more than a third of the parliament. And we have people's organisations to resist.

We must, however, double down on our grassroots work, to explain to the people, listen to the people and organise people's committees in all of the neighborhoods and municipalities around what we call the People's Congress, to debate the project of the country, with the

people.

We have to strengthen the political education work. The development of our popular media to communicate with the people, including through social media, in a much more organised way, is essential.

Lastly, engaging in grassroots struggle, that is the only way of defending rights and improving quality of life.

We have many years ahead of a right-wing, repressive government that does not have an organised social base. His central support base comes from a militarised, fanatic and sectarian grassroots base.

This also demands that the left works on the processes of renovation and bringing together the people's forces.

Jayaprakash Narayan: An Idealist Betrayed – Part IV

M. G. Devasahayam

The fourth part of a personal epitaph on Jayaprakash Narayan by former civil servant M.G. Devasahayam.

What is Fascism?

This is the dictionary definition of fascism: "a political philosophy, movement, or regime (such as that of the Fascisti) that exalts nation and often race above the individual and that stands for a centralised autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader, severe economic and social regimentation, and forcible suppression of opposition."

In an article, "Fascism Anyone?" Laurence Britt (an active writer and commentator on political, historical and economic affairs) comes out

with a 14-point list describing fascism in different dimensions:

1. *Powerful and Continuing Nationalism*: Fascist regimes tend to make constant use of patriotic mottos, slogans, symbols, songs, and other paraphernalia. Flags are seen everywhere, as are flag symbols on clothing and in public displays.
2. *Disdain for the Recognition of Human Rights*: Because of fear of enemies and the need for security, the people in fascist regimes are persuaded that human rights can be ignored in certain special cases. The people tend to look the other way or even

- approve of torture, summary executions, assassinations, long incarcerations of prisoners etc.
3. *Identification of Enemies / Scapegoats as a Unifying Cause:* The people are rallied into a unifying patriotic frenzy over the need to eliminate a perceived common threat or foe: racial, ethnic, or religious minorities, liberals, communists, socialists, terrorists, etc.
 4. *Supremacy of the Military:* Soldiers and military service are glamourised. Even when there are widespread domestic problems, the military is given a disproportionate amount of government funding.
 5. *Rampant Sexism:* The governments of fascist nations tend to be almost exclusively male-dominated. Under fascist regimes, traditional gender roles are made more rigid. Maintenance of a patriarchal status quo is the norm.
 6. *Controlled Mass Media:* Sometimes the media is directly controlled by the government, but in other cases, the media is indirectly controlled by government regulation, or sympathetic media spokespeople and executives. Censorship of the media is very common.
 7. *Obsession with National Security:* Fear is used as a motivational tool by the government over the masses.
 8. *Religion and Government are Intertwined:* Governments in fascist nations tend to use the most common religion in the nation as a tool to manipulate public opinion. Religious rhetoric and terminology are common from government leaders, even if sometimes the major tenets of the religion are diametrically opposed to the government's policies or actions.
 9. *Corporate Power is Protected:* The industrial and business aristocracy of a fascist nation often are the ones who put the government leaders into power, creating a mutually beneficial business–government relationship and power elite.
 10. *Labor Power is Suppressed:* Because the organising power of labor is often the only real threat to a fascist government, labor unions are either eliminated or severely suppressed.
 11. *Disdain for Intellectuals, Centers of Education, and the Arts:* Fascist nations tend to promote and tolerate open hostility to higher education and academia. It is not uncommon for professors and other academics to be censored or even arrested. Free expression in the arts is openly attacked, and governments often refuse to fund the arts.
 12. *Obsession with Crime and Punishment:* Under fascist regimes, the police are given almost limitless power to enforce laws. The people are often willing to overlook police abuses and even forego civil liberties in the name of patriotism.
 13. *Rampant Cronyism and Corruption:* Fascist regimes almost always are governed by groups of friends and associates who appoint each other to government positions and use governmental power and authority to protect their friends from accountability. It is not uncommon in fascist regimes for national resources and even treasures to be appropriated or even outright stolen by government leaders.
 14. *Fraudulent Elections:* Sometimes, elections in fascist nations are a complete sham. Other times elections are manipulated by smear campaigns against or even assassination of opposition candidates, use of legislation to control voting numbers or political district boundaries, and manipulation of the media. Fascist nations also typically use their judiciaries to manipulate or control elections.
- Does the RSS miss even one of these points? The 'Saffron Summit' neither addressed nor resolved even one of this points to prove that it is not fascist. On the other hand, freedom is just the antithesis of all that fascism stands for.
- Was JP a Fascist?**
- Anyone interested in the recent history of the Jan Sangh-turned-BJP's rise to power should know that they used JP to the full, sucked the blood out of him and not only abandoned him but betrayed him. What is worse, Sanghis portray him as their patriarch and a fascist. As proof they quote JP's words—"if you are fascist, then I too am a fascist" at a Jan Sangh-RSS rally! Every time I hear people berate JP in my presence blaming him for the rise of Sanghis and the horror that is India today, I shiver in anguish because I know it is not true.
- JP has pronounced himself on various aspects which rings truer today:
- **On Freedom:** "Freedom became one of the beacon lights of my life and it has remained so ever since. . . . Above all it

meant freedom of the human personality, freedom of the mind, freedom of the spirit. This freedom has become a passion of my life and I shall not see it compromised for food, for security, for prosperity, for the glory of the state or for anything else.”

- **On Communalism:** "Although almost every religious community had its own brand of communalism, Hindu communalism was more pernicious than the others because Hindu communalism can easily masquerade as Indian nationalism and denounce all opposition to it as being anti-national.”
- **On the RSS:** “Some like the RSS might do it openly by identifying the Indian nation with Hindu Rashtra, others might do it more subtly,” he said. “But in every case, such identification is pregnant with national disintegration, because members of other communities can never accept the position of second-class citizens. Such a situation, therefore, has in it the seeds of perpetual conflict and ultimate disruption.”
- **India is not Hindu – JP:** “Those who attempt to equate India with Hindus and Indian history with Hindu history are only detracting from the greatness of India and the glory of Indian history and civilization. Such person, paradoxical though this may seem, are in reality the enemies of Hinduism itself and the Hindus. Not only do they degrade the noble religion and destroy its catholicity and spirit of tolerance and harmony, but they also weaken and sunder

the fabric of the nation, of which Hindus form such a vast majority.”

- **On Cow Slaughter:** “I do not think that Hinduism has ever thought that the life of any animal, no matter how sacred, is more sacred than human life. All life is sacred, but the most sacred of all is human life.” He then contextualized the emergence of the cow as a sacred animal: “The Hindu concept that a cow’s life is inviolate is the outcome not of any primitive taboo, because beef was a common food of Hindu society at one time, but of the gradual moral and spiritual development of the Indian people in which non-Vedic Hindu religions such as Jainism and Buddhism perhaps took the lead. In course of time, respect for human life grew and non-violence came to be more and more emphasised in human relations”.

Calling such a man a fascist?

Governance by Fear—Fascist Style

Under the Emergency onslaught, India’s institutions and instruments of democratic governance—the Legislative, the Judiciary, and the Executive—were running in panic. Individuals were moving in hushed silence traumatised by what was going on. The irony is that today, even without a formal proclamation of the Emergency under the RSS rule, institutions and individuals are running in panic. Parliament passes harsh laws as Money Bills; the Reserve Bank ‘demonetises’ currency throwing people on the streets; ‘voluntary’ Aadhaar is being rammed down people’s throats

through executive diktats; rapes, lynchings and killings take place with abandon; political rallies are held to rationalise these gruesome crimes; and predatory, nature-killing ‘development’ projects are being pushed through state terror; those who oppose these are branded as extremists and anti-nationals and draconian laws, including sedition and National Security Act, are invoked against them; power is centralised and institutions of democratic governance are trivialised.

Let us take a closer look at the declared Emergency of June 1975 and the undeclared Emergency prevailing in the country in the past few years. There was no lynching of Muslims, killings or assaults on Dalits, communal riots, political killings, Hindutva majoritarianism, targeted killing of left liberal intellectuals and journalists, political rally in support of gruesome rape, cow vigilantes roaming the streets attacking and killing animal traders and meat eaters with impunity during the Emergency as it is happening now.

There were also no religion-based senas, dals, vahinis of goons, louts, and street lumpens harassing, extorting, assaulting and killing defenceless citizens. There was no arms training to young innocent girls and boys in parks and institutions. There was no fear of majority community among minority communities. There were no hate crimes against fellow citizens, no pub attacks or private kitchen searches for beef, no restrictions on food and clothes of citizens, no moral policing in parks and public places, no forcible closure of NGOs, no fellow citizen was declared extremist or anti-national or asked

to go to Pakistan or Europe.

Though the character and contents are different, there is a common thread between the Emergency and the situation at present—‘Governance by Fear’. The only difference is that the method adopted then was ‘Jhatka’ (single chop), and now it is ‘Halal’ (slow killing). The effect on freedom and liberty is the same, probably a shade worse now!

In order to concentrate political and administrative power in few hands, the instruments of public service are either demolished or made to self-destruct in order to snatch them away from the people and hand them over to a small coterie of oligarchs who own over 75 per cent of India’s wealth today. In recent years, well-orchestrated communal hatred and polarisation agenda has been unleashed to strengthen the hold of these oligarchs on India’s economy and polity.

‘Development’ has become a farce to hand over massive amount of public money to private individuals through predatory ‘infrastructure’ projects while starving the critical agriculture and social sectors. This has made India the most non-inclusive and inequitable country in the world only next to Russia! Most of the mainstream media owned or controlled by the oligarchs have turned mercenary and are singing the paeans of those who are systematically devastating the Republic and the institutions of people’s power.

‘Fear’ seems to be the overarching tool of governance. In the past few years, ‘demonetisation’, Aadhaar, and, to some extent, GST have been used to ‘terrorise’ the common man and make him run

around like headless chicken by destabilising his life and livelihood. ‘Liberalisation and privatisation’ have turned educational institutions into windowless fortress preventing young minds from blossoming into fruitful citizens and future leaders.

Never before in recent history has the politics of hate, intolerance, division, and exclusion been so dominant and the poisonous ideology which informs it gone so deep into the body politic. Never before has hate been directed with such calculated intent against minority communities, adivasis, dalits, and women; hate which is nursed, aided, and abetted by those in power. It is cruel in the extreme and it spares no one, not even innocent women and children. Violence has been given social and political sanction by those in power and perpetrators of violence have been felicitated and serenaded while victims have been punished and harassed.

Never before have the coercive instruments of state power been used with such impunity to silence those who dare to raise their voice on behalf of the oppressed. Notions of majoritarian supremacy couched in the language of cultural nationalism have found renewed support and a gigantic Goebbelsian propaganda and disinformation machinery with seemingly unlimited resources has been used to distort our understanding of history and negate our pluralistic and syncretic heritage. Institutions of higher learning that stand for nurturing the spirit of enquiry have been forced to promote a hyper nationalist agenda which treats doubt and dissidence as anti-national. Intolerance has been made acceptable and communal and caste hatred normalised and given

legitimacy. This, in turn, is used to justify vigilante violence. Perversity rules.

Never before have constitutional freedoms guaranteed to citizens come under such a sustained attack from the very people expected to protect them. Institutions of democracy and governance have been weakened and checks and balances removed to clear the passage for the march of bigotry, prejudice and intolerance. The media has been suborned or emasculated so that dissent can be silenced even before it is articulated. In the life of our nation, in post-independence India, this is possibly our bleakest moment.

The challenge posed by the RSS is deep, dangerous and disastrous: it challenges the very idea of India, the swadharma of the Republic and the cornerstone of our Constitution—“to promote among people fraternity, assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation.” Such a fascist outfit calls itself nationalist and patriotic. What a travesty?

(to be continued)

Madhu Dandavate

By

B. Vivekanandan

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Netaji Bose, Nehru and Anti-Colonial Struggle

Ram Puniyani

India's anti-colonial struggle has been the major phenomenon which built modern India into a secular democracy. Many political streams were part of this movement, and all of them struggled in their own way to drive away the British. There were also some political streams, the ones who upheld a narrow nationalism in the name of religion, who were not a part of this movement; today, in order to gain electoral legitimacy, either they are making false claims about their being a part of it, or are trying to distort events to denigrate the leaders of the freedom movement, particularly Jawaharlal Nehru. This came to the surface yet again when Prime Minister Modi was hoisting the Indian flag on the occasion of 75th anniversary of the proclamation of the Azad Hind Government. On that occasion, Modi claimed that the contributions of Bose, Patel and Ambedkar have been ignored by the ruling Nehru–Gandhi family.

Nothing can be farther from truth than this statement of his. One knows that Ambedkar was given the task of being the Chairman of the drafting committee of the Indian constitution; he was also made a minister in the first Cabinet of India, and was asked to draft the Hindu code bill. Sardar Patel was the Deputy Prime Minister, looking after the Home ministry. The compilation of Sardar Patel's letters, 'Sardar Patel Correspondence', has been edited by Durga Das. From this book, it becomes clear that Nehru and Patel were very close, and till Patel was alive most of the decisions taken were with his consent or due to

his initiative. Patel regarded Nehru both as his younger brother and his leader. Some time ago, Modi tried to propagate that Nehru ignored Sardar Patel and did not attend his funeral in Bombay. Moraji Desai's biography refutes this claim too. He says that Nehru did attend the funeral; this was also reported in the newspapers of that time.

As far as Netaji Bose is concerned, Nehru and Bose were close ideological colleagues. Both were socialists and part of the left wing of the Congress. Unlike the followers of Hindutva politics, Bose was very secular. Hindu nationalist leaders attacked Subhas Bose incessantly as he dared to reserve jobs for Muslims when he was elected to lead the Calcutta Corporation. Bose was aware of the tremendous injustice that Muslims faced in recruitment. Bose opposed both the Muslim and Hindu communalists. At the Tripuri Convention of the Indian National Congress (INC) held in 1939, Bose was elected President. Gandhi opposed to him mainly on the ground of non-violence. Bose tended to support violent means. Due to opposition within the INC, Bose left Congress to form Forward Block, a left party, which has been part of the left coalition in West Bengal for a long time. Bose and Nehru were on the same page as far as future of industrialisation and role of the public sector were concerned. Bose's biographer Leonard A. Gordan writes that Bose believed that: "Each [person] should privately follow

his religious path, but not link it to political and other public issues. Throughout his career, he reached out to Muslim leaders, first of all in his home province of Bengal, to make common cause in the name of India. His ideal, as indeed the ideal of the Indian National Congress, was that all Indians, regardless of region, religious affiliation, or caste join together to make common cause against foreign rulers."

The major difference between Gandhi–Nehru on one side and Bose on the other was on what should be the role of the INC during the Second World War. The INC in due course came to take an anti-British stance and Gandhi launched the Quit Indian movement in 1942. Bose was of the opinion that an alliance with Germany–Japan may give freedom to India. It was indeed doubtful whether an alliance with fascist forces was the right way. In case of their victory, India might have come under the control of the Japan–Germany axis which would have pushed India back by many steps. While Congress opposed the British through a mass movement, Bose launched the 'Azad Hind Fauz' (AHF). Be that as it may, Bose strongly believed in Hindu–Muslim unity and this was again exhibited when he offered a Chadar on the Mazar (tomb) of Bahadur Shah Zafar (the leader of 1857 uprising) in Rangoon, Burma, and pledged to bring his mortal remains to Delhi and bury them in the Red Fort. In contrast, the Hindu Mahasabha actively supported British war

efforts by urging Indians to join the British army. Savarkar urged upon his followers to be part of the official war committees set up by the British; the latter in turn accommodated leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha on these committees.

Savarkar also declared “No support to armed resistance against British”. It is interesting that while Netaji was fighting the British from across the border, Savarkar and Hindutva Nationalists were helping the British army which was fighting AHF of Subhash Bose! The claims that Modi and Co. are following the footsteps of Netaji is absolutely false. The fact of the matter is that the efforts of Savarkar directed against the interests of the army raised by Netaji. In contrast, even though it did not agree with Netaji’s line of action, it was the Congress which raised the legal support to fight the cases of the personnel of AHF after the war ended. Bhulabhai Deasi, Kailashnath Katju and Nehru himself came forward to battle in the courtrooms on behalf of AHF.

Today, when we are witnessing name changing of all Muslim sounding names by the BJP rulers, these false claimants of Netaji’s legacy need to be reminded that in AHF, both Hindustani and Muslim sounding names were very common. The Provisional Government formed by Subhas Bose in Singapore was titled Aarzi-Hukumat-Azad Hind (Provisional Government of free India). The name Azad Hind Fauz is on similar lines. Several Muslims were a part of this Provisional Government. What we need today is to revive the spirit of amity, which Netaji stood for and which was being practiced in AHF.

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The Wealthy Barely Pay Taxes: Will the Govt Make Them Pay?

C.P. Chandrasekhar, Jayati Ghosh

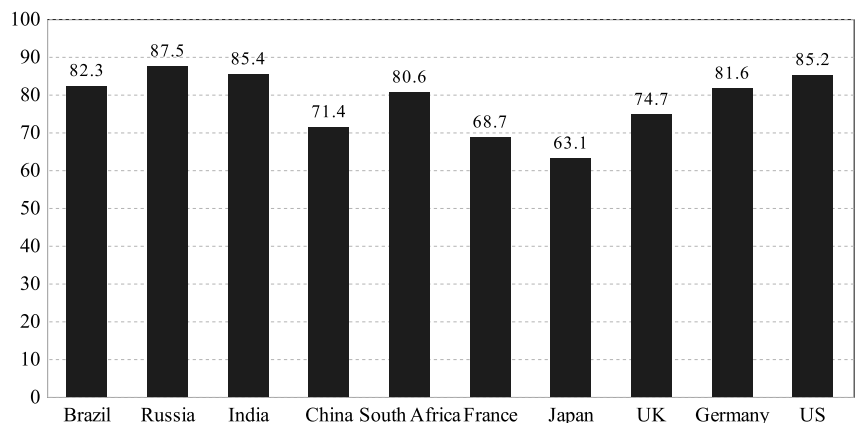
India is often mistakenly seen as a country with relatively low economic inequality. In fact, there were always very significant economic inequalities in India, which intersected with social and locational inequalities in complex ways. More significantly, the country’s inequalities widened after the internal and external economic liberalisation measures from the early 1990s, which attracted global financial investors and boosted economic growth considerably.

The estimates of low inequality are usually based on the fact that the Gini coefficients of consumption expenditure have not been so high in India (although they have increased over time). The National Sample Survey data on which such estimates are based tend to understate the extent of inequality because they underestimate the tails of the distribution, excluding the very rich and the very poor. Further,

the poor are more likely to consume their income or even more, while the rich can save out of their incomes. Official survey data indicate that the Gini coefficient increased from 31 per cent in 1993–94 to around 34 per cent in 2011–12, but this is clearly an underestimate of even the extent of consumption inequality. The further limitation is that data are only available up to the last large sample survey that was undertaken in 2011–12.

Predictably, income inequality estimates reveal greater inequality. The India Human Development Surveys of 2004–05 and 2011–12, which provide longitudinal information on a reasonably large sample of households, suggest a Gini coefficient of 55 per cent, which is not only much higher than that for consumption, but also similar to countries generally seen as very unequal, like Brazil.

Chart 1: Gini Coefficients of Wealth Distribution, 2018



Source: Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report, 2018

But the wealth inequality in India is only too apparent. India has one of the most unequal wealth distributions in the world. The annual Global Wealth Report brought out by Credit Suisse estimates that the Gini coefficient of wealth distribution in India in 2018 was as high as 85.4 per cent (Chart 1). This was only slightly below that of Russia (widely recognised to be the most unequal); it was even slightly above Brazil and the United States, where wealth inequalities are much discussed.

What is more, such wealth inequalities also increased over time in India, as shown in Chart 2. The top decile increased its share of estimated wealth from nearly 70 per cent in 2010 to nearly 81 per cent in 2016, and since then its share has fallen only marginally to 77.4 per cent in 2018. Meanwhile the trend in the share of the top 1 percentile is even more shocking: from 40.3 per cent to as much as 58.4 per cent in 2016, going down since then (largely because of changes in stock market valuations etc.) to around 52 per cent.

So only 1 per cent of Indians hold more than half of the estimated wealth of the country. Incidentally, this refers to only the recorded wealth held within the country; it is safe to assume that many of these rich persons also hold significant wealth abroad.

What is more, this category of highly privileged rich people also manages to avoid or evade taxes in India. Estimates by Lucas Chancel and Thomas Piketty suggest that the top 1 per cent of the population account for around 22 per cent of the country's income. They use a combination of data from tax returns, consumption and income surveys and national accounts data, and extrapolate their numbers to more recent years, using the tax data. Their results show a really startling increase in income inequality in the past decade in particular.

The figures also point to a dramatic increase in the share of the top decile from 1990 but especially after 2000, mirrored by a decrease in the share of the middle 40 per cent.

The share of the bottom half of the population also fell over this period. The share of the top 1

per cent of the population crossed that of the entire bottom half of the population somewhere in the mid-2000s, and since then the gap between the income shares of these groups has widened much further.

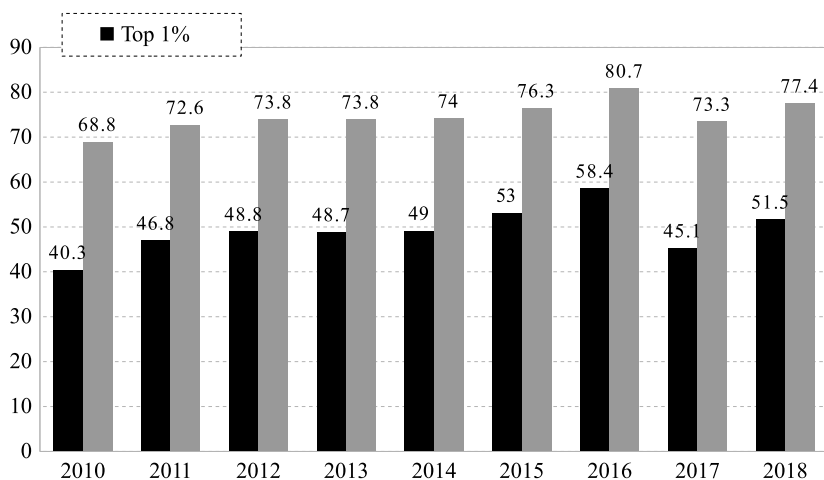
So, after a period of nearly half a century after Independence, when income share fluctuated around a broadly flat trend, there was a significant break in trend in the period of globalisation and neo-liberal economic reforms.

This sharp inequality is reflected in tax collections. The overwhelming majority of individuals either fall below the minimum tax threshold, while a much smaller proportion are able to conceal their incomes to avoid paying tax. As it is, only around 1.7 per cent of the Indian population pay income tax. However, even within the group of tax payers, there are significant inequalities, as workers and salaried persons at the bottom of the scale whose taxes are paid out of their wage incomes have much lower incomes than the top tax payers. But even within this limited group, as Chart 3 shows, the richest pay a falling share of the income taxes.

The Credit Suisse Report implies that around 3,500 Indians hold wealth that would provide annual rentier incomes in excess of ₹500 crore. But the CBDT data show that only 179 individuals reported this level of income in 2017–18. Clearly, the only way to deal with this poor level of self-reportage is with proper investigation by an efficient and honest tax administration. But this requires genuine political will to tax the rich, not bombastic statements that are not backed by any real actions.

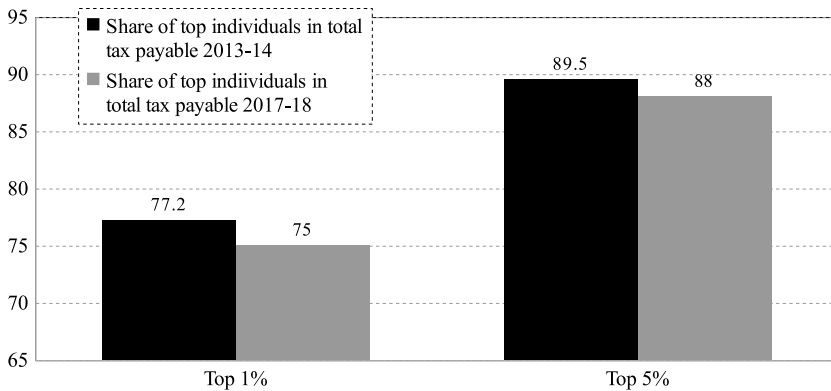
The inability to tax high net worth individuals—or to collect corporation tax from profitable companies—in turn means that the

Chart 2: India – Share of Wealth of Top 1% and 10%



Source: Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report, various issues

Chart 3: Share of Top Individuals in Total Tax Payable, %



Source: Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report, various issues

government has turned to relying more and more on indirect taxation. This is very regressive and puts the burden of raising fiscal resources onto common people. The share of direct taxes in total tax revenues has fallen from 38 per cent in 2009–10 (under the currently much-maligned UPA government) to only 32 per cent in 2017–18.

It is no secret that India has some outrageously rich people whose incomes should and could be taxed to provide revenues for important public spending. But it is also increasingly not a secret that this government has no desire to do this.

Statues Rise and Fall, Mr Modi, Only the People Remain

Prabir Purkayastha

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s unveiling of the “tallest statue in the world” has been accompanied by a high-voltage campaign on Sardar Patel’s contribution to nation-building. Of course, we know—and Modi has made it repeatedly clear—that this recognition of Patel is a part of the campaign to dismantle the legacy of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of the country. In the game of opposing pairs of icons, sometimes it is Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose versus Nehru; sometimes, Babasaheb Ambedkar versus Nehru; and often, Patel versus Nehru. Nehru remains the constant enemy for Modi and the RSS–BJP.

Why is Nehru the constant enemy? As Prime Minister, Nehru embodied the vision of the national movement: a secular state as the instrument of development for lifting Indian people out of poverty. This was the central impulse of the independence movement against

the British. These two elements—secularism and development—distinguish all the leaders of the national movement, whether Patel, Bose, Ambedkar, Nehru or others, from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). For the RSS, the British were not the enemies; the nationalists, secularists and the Muslims were.

The RSS is the only political formation that wanted an India based on religious identity; it had nothing to say about development either. For RSS, Indian and foreign capital should develop the Indian economy, with the state only playing the role of a facilitator. This is similar to what Modi has managed in the Rafale deal. It is such a vision of the state in the RSS ideology that kept the RSS and its allied movements out of the independence struggle. And this is why the secular institutions of the state and the public sector are seen as key enemies by the RSS–BJP

today. These are the institutions that need to be dismantled, along with Jawaharlal Nehru.

The “Unity” Statue of Patel has been built at a cost of Rs 2,989 crore. As Dhirubhai Patel, the 91-year-old grandnephew of Sardar Patel, has said, Patel would not have approved of this statue. He knew the value of money. Sardar Patel has been often quoted on his priorities for India: “I have one wish: that India becomes a productive nation; no one should cry for food and remain hungry.” Patel would certainly not have approved of wasting Rs 2,989 crore on a statue which will produce nothing but dubious vainglory for Prime Minister Modi.

A number of people have made calculations to list more productive uses of this amount of money. Or with the money our most travelled PM has spent on his frequent foreign tours. Prime ministers are “allowed” their vanity expenditures. We pay a

much higher price when we procure Rafale aircraft at eight billion euros, and that too without any technology transfers, and indigenous development. And we might have to “compensate” the US now for daring to buy Russian S-400 missile defence systems, by procuring US made, outmoded F16s at an even higher price. So, perhaps, we should overlook the “small” price tag of about \$400 million for the 182-metre, world’s tallest statue!

A Monument For The Indian Elite

Consider, instead, who this magnificent monument been built for; and who has paid the price for it. If we look at the website of this Statue of Unity, it is clear it is meant for the Indian elite, who can stay in an opulent hotel (a part of the statue complex), and look at the Sardar Sarovar Lake. The website states, “. . . two guest-room levels above a public floor containing meal services, a ballroom, and other meeting and event spaces. King rooms and suites are located on the river side of the building, where they have access to balconies overlooking generous gardens.”

Further, “A heavy-load open lift with a panoramic view will be built alongside the Statue of Unity. Visitors will be able to rise up within statue, walk into a viewing gallery and enjoy a panoramic view of the Sardar Sarovar project and the surrounding region from an astounding height of close to 400ft.” In other words, this statue is a monument to the Indian elite, who can come, look at a beautiful lake, rise without any effort to a height of 400 feet and have a panoramic view of the surroundings. It is about elite “consumption” of nature.

You know what you don’t see from 400 feet? People. Nor do we

see them when you look at the lake that has submerged 377 square kilometres of land.

What is missing in this picture of development? The people who have paid for the statue and the lake that has submerged their homes and lands. The people Patel talked about when he envisioned a productive nation.

It is always true that the poorest pay the most in development projects involving dams and mines. Their lands are taken away, the compensation is either not given, or meagre; they have no alternative livelihood. The gains are for capitalists, who make money out of the projects, then enjoy the continued benefits. The landed peasantry and big landowners benefit from the irrigation provided downstream. Even the electricity from the power house of hydro-electric projects do not reach the villages nearby, only towns and industries far away. This is how capital views development and that is how it operates under capitalism.

Tribals Badly Hit And Displaced

The Narmada Dams—Sardar Sarovar and Indira Sagar—are no different. The tribal villages that have been displaced for the dams are yet to receive water or electricity, the affected people their full compensation. The villagers near Sardar Sarovar say that 28 villages near the Sardar Sarovar Dam are yet to receive water. 72 tribal villages kept a day’s fast on October 31, the day Modi inaugurated the statue. There have been widespread protests by the tribals in the area. Posters of Modi and Rupani have been blackened, requiring police protection for posters!

The “Unity” Statue has fared no better. The heads of 22 villages wrote

an open letter to the PM, saying that they would not welcome him for the inauguration. They wrote, “These forests, rivers, waterfalls, land and agriculture supported us for generations. We survived on them. But, everything is being destroyed now and celebrations are also planned. Don’t you think it’s akin to celebrating someone’s death? We feel so.” So much for Modi’s unity.

It also appears that there were other issues with the statue project. The relevant environmental clearances were not taken, nor the villagers consulted, as the law requires for such projects.

Modi’s statue project brings to mind the relationship between monumental architecture and fascist imagination. From ancient rulers to modern “strongmen”, they all seem to be fascinated by size. And let us also understand Patel’s attraction for Modi: if Patel was the Iron Man of 20th century India, Modi wants to be his 21st-century version. This is as much statue of himself as it is of Patel’s.

History knows how to deal with such vainglory. Shelley, the English romantic revolutionary poet, wrote about the remains of a mighty statue:

And on the pedestal these words appear:

*"My name is Ozymandias,
king of kings:*

*Look on my works, ye Mighty,
and despair!"*

*Nothing beside remains:
round the decay*

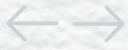
*Of that colossal wreck,
boundless and bare,*

*The lone and level sands
stretch far away.*

Statues rise and fall, Mr. Modi, only the people remain.



Acharya Vinoba



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विनोबा

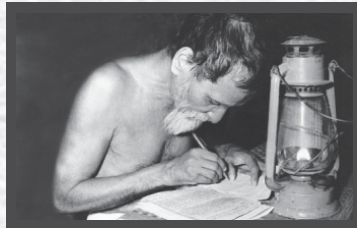
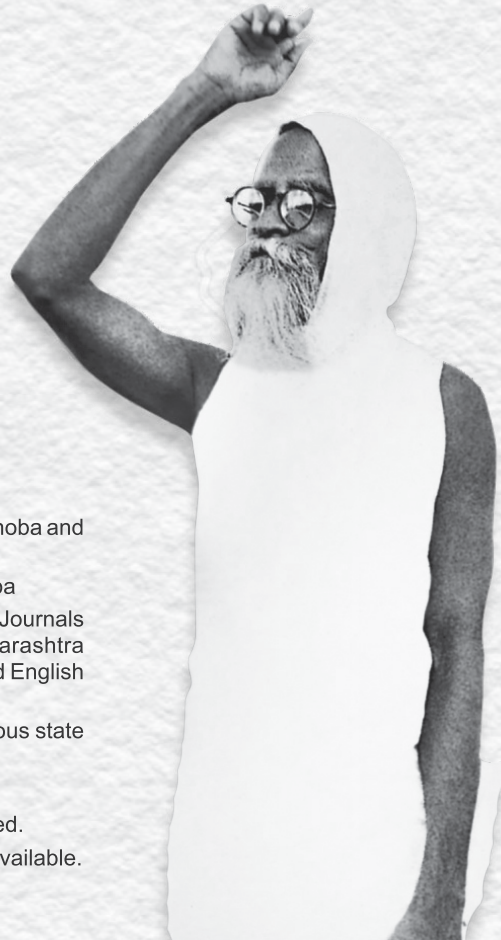
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Acharya Vinoba - a spiritual leader was also an academic scholar and had studied all religions in depth. He was a philosopher, well-known author, educationist and sociologist. He had initiated and lead the Bhoodan and Gramdan movement. Paramdham Prakashan (ग्रामसेवा मंडळ) Pavanar with the help of Maharashtra Knowledge Corporation Limited has developed www.vinoba.in website in which the entire literature of Acharya Vinoba is hosted.

**An eloquent insight into the thoughts of
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Fasting Saints Could Become a Curse for Politics of Hindutva

Sandeep Pandey

Former Indian Institute of Technology (Kanpur) Professor Guru Das Agrawal, who became an ascetic in 2011 at the age of 79 years and came to be known as Swami Gyan Swaroop Sanand, died on 11 October, 2018 on the 112th day of his fast, demanding a law for conservation of river Ganga. Inspired by Professor Agrawal, 40-year-old Sant Gopal Das, a Jain saint, who has fasted earlier for release of encroached grazing land for cows in Haryana, also sat on fast for the same cause two days after Professor Agrawal began his fast, on 24 June, 2018, at Badri Dham temple in Badrinath. Presently he is in the Intensive Care Unit of AIIMS, New Delhi. As a sequel to Professor Agrawal's fast, 26-year-old Brahmachari Atmabodhanand began his fast on 24 October at Matre Sadan, which Professor Agrawal had chosen as the site of his fast. Even when Professor Agrawal was alive, the head of Matre Sadan, Swami Shivanand, had warned persons belonging to Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, the ideological parent of the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party that is now in power both at Delhi and

Dehradun, who were visiting him that if anything happened to Swami Sanand, then he and his disciples would continue the unfinished task undertaken by Professor Agrawal. Professor Agrawal's fast was the 59th fast by a saint associated with Matre Sadan, and Atmabodhanand's fast is the 60th. 62-year-old Swami Punyanand of Matre Sadan gave up foodgrains and is on fruit diet since Atmabodhanand started his fast on 24 October, and is prepared to shift to a water diet in the event of Atmabodhanand becoming a casualty.

Earlier Swami Nigamanand, then 35 years of age, also associated with Matre Sadan, died on the 115th day of his fast in 2011 demanding curbs on mining in Ganga. Matre Sadan claims that he was actually murdered by a mining mafia associated with the BJP that was in power in Uttarakhand then. Swami Gokulanand, who fasted with Swami Nigamanand from 4 to 16 March, 1998, a year after Matre Sadan was established, is also believed to have been murdered by mining mafia in 2003 while he was living in anonymity at Bamaneshwar temple in Nainital. Baba Nagnath died at

Manikarnika Ghat in Varanasi in 2014 fasting for the same demand as that of Professor Agrawal—to let Ganga flow uninhibited and unpolluted, *aviral* and *nirmal*, respectively.

Both Swami Shivanand and Brahmachari Atmabodhanand in their separate letters to the Prime Minister have quoted Srimadbhagwat to say that since Ganga has become polluted with sins, it is the duty of saints to rid her of these sins by sacrificing their lives. But they have not remained content by considering it their duty to fast for Ganga as a religious exercise. They have chosen to criticise the government, its ministers, its policies and also its attitude. Both saints have accused the Prime Minister of adopting consumerism driven development policies which view Ganga as merely water resources to be exploited for profits. They have reserved their harshest criticism for the Minister of Water Resources, River Basin Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, Nitin Gadkari. Swami Shivanand has in fact doubted his capacity for appreciating the dignity of Ganga. Atmabodhanand has condemned Gadkari for having lied just before Professor Agrawal's death that his demands have been met. Both saints have been especially critical of the corporatisation of water—the bottled water industry and the marketing of 'holy Gangajal.' Swami Shivanand has come down heavily on Modi for his love for foreign sojourns and attempts to make the cultural city of Varanasi into Kyoto. Atmabodhanand thinks that this government is 'nationalist' only for namesake, otherwise it has a western view of development. He has demanded from the PM immediate compliance of two of the

four demands raised by Professor G.D. Agrawal—halting of ongoing and proposed hydroelectric projects on Ganga and ban on any mining in it as an expression of homage to Professor Agrawal on behalf of the country. Atmabodhanand has criticised the government for having considered Professor Agrawal's fast as 'one man's intransigence.' He says that Professor Agrawal represented the pain felt by what he describes as 'tradition of saints willing to sacrifice themselves for the sake of Ganga. These saints are all deeply concerned with the deteriorating condition of Ganga, state of global environment, immoral development policies promoting crime and corruption and the irrational man bent upon destroying all living beings, environment and the culture of co-existence. He feels that it is the arrogance of power because of which the government refuses to recognise this concern of saints.

As the number of saints dying

The Reason for Renaming Places

Apoorvanand

We fail to see in the excitement generated by the incessant renaming of towns and railway stations in India that the past, which these new old names allude to, is an imagined land that we are being invited to inhabit. We are not exactly recovering lost ground, because as the Hindi poet Bodhisattva wrote, there never was a Prayag that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) claim to be restoring now. What is being sold in the defence of capturing the glory of the past is an ideological construct.

This was clear when a nativist

while fasting for the sake of Ganga keeps piling up, and resolve of more of them to embark on the same path becomes stronger, it may be difficult for the country and its government to ignore this phenomenon. The BJP, now busy raking up the Ram temple issue in Ayodhya and the Sabrimala issue in Kerala, can ignore the issue of Ganga at its own peril. People haven't forgotten that the PM claimed that he got a call from Mother Ganga to contest his parliamentary election from Varanasi. There is a high profile Namami Gange project in place with a huge budget that is aimed at cleaning Ganga, but which seems to have achieved little. Ganga has become more polluted as much water has flowed through it since Narendra Modi won his election from Varanasi. In fact, the issue of Ganga could become Narendra Modi's and BJP's achilles heel in the 2019 general elections.

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and “vulgar” name like Gurgaon was elevated to Gurugram. The defence used for the change was the myth of Gurugram having been the abode of Dronacharya. Gurgaon has been flaunted as a futuristic city. However, there was no protest from the citizens of this postmodern city to the name change. No question was raised about why the tradition of Dronacharya, who had tried to disable his student Ekalavya by cutting his thumb, needed to be celebrated.

An imagined past

Why is the BJP getting away

with this? Simply because, for a long time, we have been fed with nostalgia about an India that was “taken away” from us 1,200 years ago. We have been told—and we believe—that Bharat was once a *sona ki chidiya* (a golden bird). The era of the Guptas is referred to as *Swarna Yug* (golden period). This historical imagination leads us to believe that the golden age ended with the coming of the Muslims and all we have to do now is go back to that period. When I heard an old, seasoned socialist lament the cowardice of the Indian people which kept them under different forms of slavery for more than 1,000 years, I realised that this is so deeply ingrained in us that it has almost become a part of our subconscious. This can also be the reason for Prime Minister Narendra Modi not facing censure in Parliament when he said, while speaking after the debate on the motion of thanks to the President for his address, that the slave mentality of 1,200 years continues to trouble us.

The subconscious feeling is that nothing new was created in this period, especially during the time of Muslim rule. It is that everything new was created before these rulers came here, and what they did was break what was created, distort them, or simply defile them by giving them new names, their names. So, the Babri Masjid could not be a new monument; it had to necessarily be built on the ruins of an earlier existing structure. Nor was the Taj Mahal; it was built on a Hindu temple. This feeling is of ownership as well as authorship. It feeds on a deep-seated inferiority complex among Hindus that the symbols representing India largely bear a Muslim identity, thereby making

India look like a Muslim country. We take comfort in the so-called fact that nearly 95% of Muslims in India were originally Hindus who were later converted, and it is therefore possible to restore them to their Hinduness. It is the same belief that plays out in the quest to rename places and monuments—they don't need to go, they only need to be renamed and rehabilitated.

It has been argued that even after centuries of ‘Muslim rule’, neither Prayag nor Ayodhya vanished. Ayodhya coexisted with Faizabad, and Allahabad kept Prayag alive in it. But the ‘originalists’ will rest only after erasing Muslim or ‘alien’ names which have covered the original Hindu names. But Indian culture presents a unique challenge for them. For example, how should Patna be rechristened? As Pataliputra, Bankipur or Patna Sahib? How do you deal with Sheikhpura? It has Sheikh, a Muslim-sounding name, plus Pura, which comes from a Sanskrit ‘pur’ or ‘puri’. What do we do with mohallas?

This brings us to the real intent, which is something else. In some villages in Haryana, Muslims live disguised under Hindu-sounding names. This is seen as their willingness to assimilate into ‘Indian culture’. Culture is manifested in names, clothing, food habits, etc. Muslims are constantly asked to adopt so-called Indian ways, which means accepting Hindu norms in all aspects of their life. It is now being argued that even mosques are not essential for their religious identity.

Cultural genocide

The renaming of places and ‘reclaiming’ of monuments are part of a large and long process of cultural genocide. The term

might be extreme for some people, but for Raphael Lemkin, the man who coined the term genocide in his book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, the cultural destruction of a group is as important as the physical annihilation of its members. According to Lemkin: “The world represents only so much culture and intellectual vigour as are created by its component national groups. Essentially the idea of a nation signifies constructive cooperation and original contributions, based upon genuine traditions, genuine culture, and well-developed national psychology. The destruction of a nation, therefore, results in the loss of its future contribution to the world. . . . Among the basic features which have marked progress in civilisation are the respect for and appreciation of the national characteristics and qualities contributed to world culture by different nations—characteristics and qualities which . . . are not to be measured in terms of national power or wealth.”

We need to stress on original contributions, on the genuine traditions that Lemkin mentions. A community feels diminished if it is made to think that it has not made any genuine, original contribution to the life of a nation of which it is a part. The drive to free India of Muslim influences is a clear message to the Muslims that this nation is not the result of cooperation between them and other religious communities. It is a message that they have made no contribution to India's cultural life.

In *The Discovery of India*, Jawaharlal Nehru describes India as an ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie have been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer has

completely hidden or erased what had been written previously. Nehru understood the way cultures grow. They are not ordered from above. He does not propose that we go back to our origins to feel authentically Indian because there is no original point as such in the life of a nation. In the same vein, Kwame Anthony Appiah, in *The Lies That Bind*, says a nation is a “fabric to be woven, not a mineral to be mined.”

We must be clear that the present regime is not interested in culture. It is interested in capturing the nation by making Hindus feel that they have conquered this land and taken it back from “aliens”. A drug is being generated and it is putting people on a high. It is the drug of victory.

The nationalist project of the present ruling party is based on the idea of making invisible and subjugating an entire population to keep the majority in a permanent state of dominance. This renaming is part of a cultural genocidal project.

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With Due Respect, Finance Minister

Arun Kumar

The government did not celebrate the second anniversary of demonetisation, one of its biggest policy initiatives. It has celebrated the anniversary of all other big policies. Why the diffidence?

The finance minister did come out with a statement listing the achievements of demonetisation. But his statement must be seen in light of the Minutes of the RBI Board Meeting on November 8, 2016, that recommended demonetisation. The Board had made it clear that demonetisation was not the way to tackle black money or counterfeit currency. Thus, two of the main objectives that were emphasised in the PM’s announcement on demonetisation were undermined the very day the policy was announced. No wonder, soon after it became clear the money was flooding into the banks, the government started talking of a cashless economy. And then it started talking about a less cash economy, digitisation and formalisation of the informal economy. It was said that these deposits would create a paper trail and black money generation would become difficult.

Initially, there was a spurt in the use of electronic means of transactions but this pace could not be sustained as more currency became available. The country had anyhow been slowly moving toward a less cash economy prior to demonetisation and this has continued. It was said that the government would restrict currency in circulation to less than what existed on November 7, 2016. But

now the currency in circulation is about 10 per cent more than the Rs 18 lakh crore that existed prior to demonetisation. To be fair, it is less than what it would have been if the increase in currency in circulation had continued at the pace prior to demonetisation.

The FM has cited three achievements of demonetisation. First, an increase in digital transactions. Second, expansion in the tax base with more people paying taxes. Third, the creation of paper trails that will make it difficult to generate black incomes in the future. Interestingly, echoing the RBI Board, he said confiscation of currency was not an objective of demonetisation.

The line earlier was that black money, held in the form of high denomination notes, would not return to banks since that would create paper trails. The then Attorney General had told the Supreme Court that Rs 3 to 4 lakh crore would not return to the banks. Soon it became clear that all the money would come back since those holding black money had worked out ways of converting their old notes to new notes. The government then started saying that was good since now the people who had deposited large sums of money could be investigated.

The government issued about 18 lakh notices to those who had deposited more than Rs 5 lakh into their bank accounts. However, there is a misperception that equates cash with black money. Cash is needed by businesses as working capital and households keep cash

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in hand for transactions and as a precaution against contingency. So, a petrol station may have deposited Rs 20 crore in the demonetisation period of 50 days, based on its daily collections. This is not black money. Most of those who deposited large sums of cash would have worked out how to show the deposits as cash in hand in their balance sheet. So, it would be difficult for the tax department to prove that the money deposited was black. Finally, data shows that the department does not have the capacity to audit so many accounts, in addition to the usual audits it conducts.

Yes, the number of returns being filed and tax being collected has increased. But, the direct tax to GDP ratio has hardly increased compared to the pre-demonetisation period. The black economy is more than 60 per cent of the GDP and even if 10 per cent of it had come into the tax net, it would have yielded 2 per cent of the GDP as additional tax collection. This has not happened.

It is well-known that 67 per cent of those in the tax net file either nil return or very low returns. The effective number of taxpayers has always been low in India. Even in the case of GST, the FM is on record saying that 5 per cent of those under GST pay 95 per cent of the tax. Further, he has lamented that even though 1.1 crore have registered under GST, only about 67 per cent pay tax.

The spurt in filing of returns is partly due to the fine being imposed from this year for late filing. So, many more have filed returns in time. Earlier many waited till March 31 to file returns. The numbers have also increased because of the increase in salaries after the implementation of the Seventh Pay Commission report.

However, most of the increase will be in the category of those who have just entered the tax net. So, the increase in tax collection will not be much. The increase in the number of those who filed tax returns is a result of other factors, and only marginally due to demonetisation.

Increased digitisation could have been achieved without causing pain to the economy. Nigeria has a low cash-GDP ratio but a big black economy. Japan has a high cash-GDP ratio but a small black

economy. So, digitisation does not necessarily check black income generation.

Finally, formalisation does not help reduce the black economy since the informal sector hardly generates any black incomes. Most incomes in this sector are way below the taxable limit which is rather high in India at three times the per capita income—with concessions and deductions it can be five times the per capital income.

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#Me Too: A Voice that Awoke the Drowsy

H.S. Anupama

Inferiority complex is the gift that women in India receive as part of their socialisation, indoctrinated at every stage. The main goal of social institutions such as marriage, family, motherhood and others is the repression of women. Not fighting this repression and embracing it as the natural state of being is the main cause of all the issues that women face in this country.

Hence, a sigh of a woman speaks what even thousand pages cannot comprehend.

‘Me Too’ is a collection of many such sighs. The stories that have come out are not personal experiences of pain, of either Priya Ramani, Tanushree Dutta, Shruti Hariharan or Kangana Ranaut, they are the repressed stories of oppression suffered by innumerable women. ‘Me Too’, just like any other campaign or movement, aims for achieving equality: the oppressed should organise and fight for equality, and ‘Me Too’ has organised certain sections of women.

Most social organisations thrive

upon male domination, and cinema and media are not an exception to this. The colorful world of cinema and media that foster patriarchy and male domination are the prominent sites of sexual harassment.

Talking about sexual harassment that women face in workplace is perceived to be an act that violates the dignity of the organisation, thus it is a tool that men use to control women in the workplace. Most men believe in the Freudian idea of female sexuality, according to which it is ‘inactive, hysterical and innately submissive’, and women are socialised into believing that she is the one to be desired by men and is incapable of desiring. This is the sentiment that runs through across classes. This in fact is obstructing liberation of women in its true sense.

‘Me Too’ in India

‘Me Too’ has set the stage for the voices against sexual harassment that cuts through these oppressive sentiments prevalent in the worlds of cinema and media. The discussion

around the violation of self-esteem and respect of female actors was started in the Malayalam film industry following the accusation of sexual harassment against actor Dileep in 2017 by a female actor. The prominent female actors of the industry came together to form the 'Women in Cinema Collective', and this rolled out the movement across the nation. The same year in October, Alyssa Milano, a female actor of Hollywood, accused director Harvey Weinstein of sexual harassment giving rise to the Me Too campaign as 'hashtag Me Too' (#Me Too). It started in Hollywood and in no time the movement spread like wildfire across the globe. Elite women began to out the perverted behaviour of their prominent elite male counterparts. The true colours of the heroes, directors and other male members of the cinema fraternity came out in public.

In September 2018, during the anniversary of the #Me Too, Tanushree Datta, a former actor in the Hindi film industry, publicly accused Nana Patekar of sexual harassment. She had to pay a heavy price for the harassment that she had faced in the hands of the actor—the harassment had pushed her towards depression and she had turned towards eastern spirituality, Buddhism, Vipassana, and Christianity to recover from depression. She also had to bid adieu to her career in the film industry and is currently settled in the United States.

This led to more women speaking out. Priya Ramani, a senior journalist, accused M.J. Akbar, a senior journalist and a Central minister, of sexual harassment; following Ramani, horrific stories of harassment of many more women by Akbar began to roll out. Even in

Karnataka the same developments took place and 'Me too' has become the centre of all discussions: most of the men who have been accused are busy formulating ways to destroy the careers of the women who are speaking out and repress their voices. They are also making efforts to erase all the available evidences against them.

'Metro Feminism' ?

#Me Too is also being strongly criticised by a few.

Some are branding these women who are raising their voices as homosexuals and some female colleagues of accused actors are busy giving clean chit in their defence, claiming that they are innocent. Many women are seen arguing that these women who are raising their voices are doing so to gain cheap publicity. All such criticism makes one wonder, what is it that is making women to turn their backs on other women who are speaking up?

In the history of human social development, the first one to be enslaved were women. As Frederick Engels had said, woman has been a slave of a slave of a slave of a slave. The state of mind that was responsible for this enslavement can still be felt thriving around us even in 2018. Even though none of the scriptures ban the entry of menstruating women into the Sabarimala temple, and the Supreme Court has also passed a verdict permitting the entry of women, we still see women themselves protesting against the verdict and insisting that women should not enter the temple. In just the same way, there are democratically elected female representatives who insist that their male relatives accompany

them to their office meetings. It is because of this same kind of mind that some women are criticising those women who are speaking out in the #Me Too movement. All such instances show the influence of the centuries-old ideology that makes women submissive and enslaved.

This is also the main reason why women find it difficult to talk about the harassment they face. Even when they dare to speak out, their voices are silenced by arguing that they are subjective experiences. Campaigns and movements like #Me Too aim precisely to break this notion and claim the universality of these experiences. Those women who are speaking up are saying, "My problem is not only mine. Sexual harassment should be discussed openly just as caste–class–religion based violence is discussed and the solution should be sought publicly."

Some women have criticised the #Me Too campaign as 'Metro Feminism' and 'Corporate Feminism.' This criticism is based on the increased attention that the narratives of sexual harassment of the upper class and famous women are receiving from the same media that has always ignored the plight of working class women.

Yes, it is true that these women are upper class, elite and famous. But then, who made these women famous? It is the personalising of life that has generated a market for the private lives of these women, in turn making them famous. The society and media have both forgotten that these famous women and men are just like any other human beings who eat, drink, cry and celebrate. If one peeps into their personal lives and reports, it becomes 'breaking news'.

Let us not forget, that historically, it has been the responsibility of

women to guard the honour, name and fame of a certain community, clan and/or class. This responsibility in turn has forced women to remain silent until death. After centuries of enslavement, some women have taken advantage of the limited opportunities made available by modern society to step outside their homes and some of them have become so successful that they have made a name for themselves. It is hurtful to see these women who took a step forward towards change, being criticised for the wrong reasons. This campaign no doubt should not be limited only to the famous and upper class women but should also reach out to the working class and lower strata women; but the question is, whose responsibility is it to make this possible?

Such criticisms also assume that the working class and lower strata lack the ability to think. This assumption in itself is a reflection of feudal values. There exist working class women who are empowered to make all the decisions in their lives on their own, and in the same class there are also women who are forced to become prey of the rich and mighty. Behind the walls of palaces there are women who are lazy and lavish and also there are women who cry due to oppression. In Karnataka, when a female Ramakatha singer (an upper caste woman who went to court) was sexually harassed by a 'God man', the community of the singer had claimed, "if she was of a lower caste then it would have become international news, but since she is from the upper caste, no one is interested to listen to her voice." On the other hand, such groups also exist which say, "When Dalit women in Khairlanji-Vijayapura-Malur are raped and killed, it doesn't move

anybody, but a Nirbhaya would drag the whole nation out on the streets."

What is the Truth?

Violence is the only truth.

Mathura was a tribal girl; Aruna Shanubaug was a nurse; Nirbhaya was from Delhi; Soujanya was from a poor family near Dharmasthala, Karnataka; young girls of Vijaypur and Kashmir were Dalit and Muslim—true. But irrespective of their caste, religion, class, nationality, organisation or party affiliation, when someone says they were hurt, it should shake one's conscience. This is the only truth. It is the responsibility of each one of

us, to be there for those who confide about harassment and to ensure it does not happen with anybody again in future. The women's movement today has to break the boundaries of community, class and sexuality.

Standing with all those who are oppressed is feminism. It stands for the liberation of all oppressed human beings, both women and men. If campaigns like #Me Too, Happy to Bleed, Kiss of Love and the temple entry movement aim at shaking at least one stone in the foundation of the casteist patriarchal Indian society, then it is our duty to support them. They should be supported by every woman.

Chhattisgarh's Mineral Wealth Not Benefiting People

Subodh Varma

As the people of Chhattisgarh go to polls to elect another state Assembly and government, dominant political parties have completely ignored a vital question: what are they going to do about the state's rich natural resources? That's because the current model of unbridled private exploitation of minerals, land and water, and the blind denudation of forests, is the favourite model of choice. And there is no plan of changing it.

Remember: Chhattisgarh has deposits of 28 minerals, including over 52 billion tonnes of coal (18% of India's deposits), 2.7 billion tonnes of high-quality iron ore (19% of India's deposits), and over 37% of India's tin ore deposits, besides bauxite, limestone, dolomite, quartzite, etc. In 2016-17, some Rs 23,339 crore worth of mineral

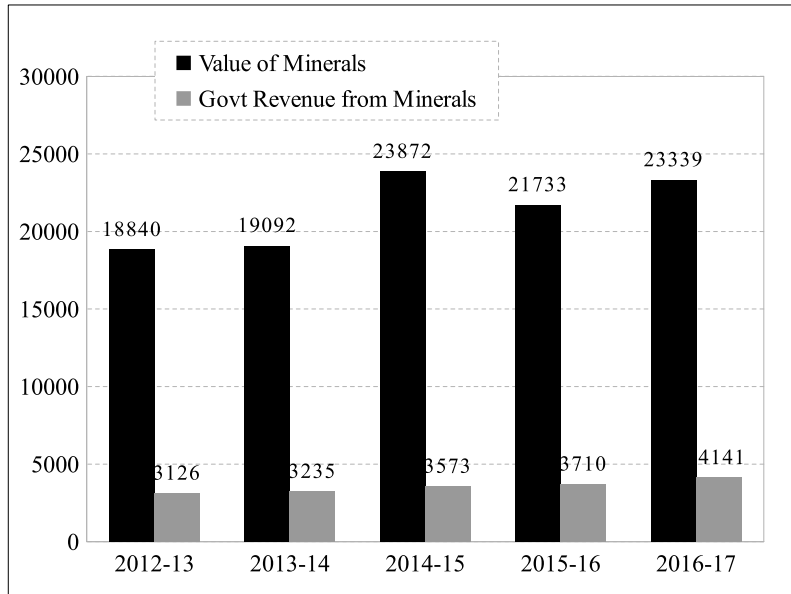
wealth was extracted from the state.

What do the state's people get out of this? Have a look at the chart below which shows the value of minerals extracted and the revenue that the state government earned for the past few years.

As can be seen, only roughly 16-17% of the value flows to state government coffers. The rest of it is swallowed up by the predatory mining companies that had been granted leases of over 24,000 hectares of mining blocks till 2016, as per the Indian Bureau of Mines.

India's political establishment has created the impression that this is normal. How else will natural resources be managed if not by giving leases to private companies who will mobilise resources to extract the minerals and process them? But this is not the only way!

Table : Chhattisgarh – Value of Minerals and Govt Revenue (Rs crore)



Consider this: the extraction of natural resources could have been executed and managed—in a much more sustainable way—by state agencies so that its benefits could have directly belonged to the people. After all, before the current hysteria for the private sector began, India was mining coal and iron and all the other mineral resources.

This would have given an additional benefit: the coercive displacement of people from lands in order to get at the rich stores of minerals below it would have been—perhaps—tempered. It would definitely have been more subject to accountability and oversight.

But currently, such is the overwhelming desire of the state government—held by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) since the state was hived off from Madhya Pradesh—to please powerful private entities that all rules and laws are reportedly broken to grab land from hapless villagers.

Perhaps, the state government has been spending a lot on social

sector (education, health, etc.) or on general development programmes? A quick look at RBI's data on social sector expenditure as a share of the gross state domestic product (GSDP) shows that this spending has stagnated at around 11–12% for the past several years. So, the great growth rate of Chhattisgarh's economy by over 10% in the last decade, spurred by mining and power plants and cement factories, has not meant any relief from grinding poverty in the state's vast hinterland. Naya Raipur is, of course, on the road to becoming a smart city (whatever that means!) but in distant tribal hamlets and Dalit habitations, there is no change in life.

Chhattisgarh has also done well in terms of agricultural production, yet its farmers are seething with anger because their back-breaking labour is not worth much. The prices they get for their produce barely meet expenses. The rural job guarantee scheme (MGNREGS) provides a daily wage of Rs 174 only. Last year, some 42 lakh persons worked at this

wage in the scheme.

Had the resources of Chhattisgarh been used more equitably, 38% of children under 5 would not have been stunted, 42% would not be anaemic, nor would a stunning 47% of all women be anaemic, as per the latest data from National Family Health Survey-4. Female literacy rate in the state is just 66% and only 27% of women have had 10 years of schooling.

If the ongoing elections throw up a strange result, see it as a cry for help from the state's people—they hardly have any choices as the dominant narrative is tilted against them.

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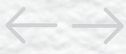
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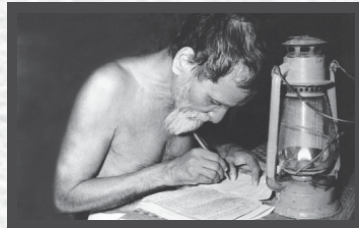
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Acharya Vinoba - a spiritual leader was also an academic scholar and had studied all religions in depth. He was a philosopher, well-known author, educationist and sociologist. He had initiated and lead the Bhoodan and Gramdan movement. Paramdham Prakashan (ग्रामसेवा मंडळ) Pavanar with the help of Maharashtra Knowledge Corporation Limited has developed www.vinoba.in website in which the entire literature of Acharya Vinoba is hosted.

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Corbyn Triumphant at Labour Conference

Veronica Fagan

After a summer in which Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn faced endless vitriol from the right in the party and the media, Labour's conference in October 2018 was a triumph. Commitments from the platform and the decisions of delegates on crucial areas will lead to an even more radical manifesto for the next general election than that which had such a positive impact in 2017.

On health, housing, education, welfare benefits, nationalisations, opposition to racism, closure of two immigration detention centres, solidarity with Palestinian state and much more, the conference set out an impressive anti-austerity, antiracist and internationalist agenda. Labour's economic programme included a programme of investment swivelling away from London and the South East towards the 'left behind' areas of Britain.

Sometimes the proposals came from the Shadow Cabinet—such as with Margaret Greenwood's welcome pledge to completely overhaul the social security system when we win a Labour government—a commitment made after delegate after delegate had called for Universal Credit to be stopped and scrapped. On other occasions, the conference referred back weak formulas coming from the National Policy Forum—for example to demand that Labour should abolish Grammar Schools and not just freeze them. The other context was the reiteration of left victories at last year's conference—for example that tenants must be consulted over regeneration

proposals—which were not reflected in the report.

While the environment was not debated, Corbyn's speech saw key commitments to lead by example on climate change: with a pledge to transform Britain's energy sources and the introduction of over 400,000 skilled green jobs on union rates to achieve a 60% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and going further with plans to reduce emissions to zero by the middle of the century.

The right was noticeable by their absence—their fringe meetings were thin, they had no impact on the conference floor and there was no mass exit for Corbyn's speech as there has been in the preceding years since he was elected.

Delegations from the CLPs in particular were impressively diverse with a significant number of passionate speeches from black women and disabled delegates contributing to an electric atmosphere. The sea of Palestinian flags, waved by the overwhelming majority of delegates when that motion was moved, was a particular high point. The conference heard time and again tales of the cruel reality of Tory Britain and people's urgent determination to get Corbyn elected Prime Minister.

Deepening Democracy

Under Tony Blair, Labour promoted reactionary policies on most issues. British involvement in the Iraq war was the nadir accompanying a domestic policy that was accommodating to

neoliberalism. This was partly achieved by changing party structures and destroying the sovereignty of the conference—it became a media show, not a place for the membership to make policy.

Labour Party conference 2017 set up a democracy review, taking submissions and organising discussions across Britain with the intention of bringing back proposals to this conference. The context was clear—to codify the shift to the left made under Corbyn, in particular the massive increase in membership, by deepening democracy.

The review was extremely wide ranging and the conference took a series of crucial decisions. Proposals to set up or strengthen democratic structures for women, black members, disabled members, LGBT+ members and young members were overwhelmingly passed. The conference itself will in future be structured primarily around resolutions from members and affiliates rather than MPs, councillors and the Shadow Cabinet having all the power.

There were some limits to this progress. Proposals to change the way decisions about local government—as much a bastion of the right wing as the Parliamentary Labour Party—are taken were thrown into the long grass by the National Executive Committee (NEC) for some unknown reason.

Parliamentary selections were not part of the review, but due to be dealt with through rule changes including one which would have introduced a system of 'open

selection' by which the members in every constituency would have the right to decide on their prospective candidate for parliament. However the NEC brought forward a weaker proposal which was discussed and voted through—thus blocking a formal debate on the more radical idea. What was agreed is a step forward, and almost certainly would not have happened without a vibrant campaign for open selection—but it's not as good as it could have been.

Most puzzlingly, the NEC brought forward a rule change for the election of future leaders which actually makes the current situation worse in terms of the ability of MPs to block a successor to Corbyn from the left. It was a needless own goal.

Brexit

It was inevitable that Brexit would be a major discussion at the conference. The issue is a complex one for the party and the leadership. The great majority of Labour members supported remaining in the EU in the referendum, but there was a strong leave majority in many traditionally Labour constituencies, especially those that have suffered most from the ravages of deindustrialisation. Corbyn has been rightly cautious about not seeming dismissive of them by backing a second referendum too precipitately.

But with increasing divisions inside the Tory Party and the strong possibility of a constitutional crisis if Parliament votes against the options on the table, the conference moved the party closer to this commitment than ever before by overwhelmingly agreeing to a motion on the subject. A general election is still the preferred option, but a further referendum—and the option of remaining—is not

excluded.

It was clear in the discussion that significant differences still remain but the motion was passed overwhelmingly and most are claiming it as a victory.

And the leader's speech, with

which conference concluded, was the most self-assured Corbyn has given. With a confident leader and an exhilarated membership, there is a strong sense that getting a Corbyn government is really within touching distance.

Jayaprakash Narayan: An Idealist Betrayed – Part V

M.G. Devasahayam

The fifth and final part of a personal epitaph on Jayaprakash Narayan by former civil servant M.G. Devasahayam.

Betrayal most foul—JP in tears

JP was treated as the patriarch of the Janata Parivar, even though he was six years younger than Morarji Desai, the country's first non-Congress prime minister. JP was also the same age as Charan Singh and six years older than the other claimant in the bitter struggle for the prime ministerial position, Jagjivan Ram. JP remained revered as the grand old man of the Janata Party because he took himself out of the race for positions and power and became its conscience keeper. There is another reason why today's governing leaders of the RSS-BJP must hold JP in high regard and venerate him: they owe the party's inclusion in the mainstream and subsequent capturing of power pan-India to him. But what has been happening is just the opposite.

The Janata Party government collapsed in mid-1979 due to intrigues and betrayal indulged in by the RSS and the Jan Sangh and other elements who were part of the Morarji Desai government. Shortly after this, I visited JP in his Kadam

Kuan residence at Patna. He was on dialysis but made me sit beside him. That he had taken Janata's collapse to heart was evident when he said with tears welling in his eyes, "Devasahayam, I have failed yet again." Then he opened up and told me as to how the RSS/Jan Sangh was responsible for the 'destruction' of the Janata Party which he had laboriously put together as an alternative to the Congress party so that a healthy democracy could be sustained in the country.

He then narrated the beginning of the JP Movement and the ideals it represented. Since the Movement was almost entirely spearheaded by unorganised youth, he had to take the help of cadre-based entities like the RSS and rely on them. For instance, he declared after Lok Sangharsh Samiti's formation that Nanaji Deshmukh was to be handed its leadership in the event of his arrest. It didn't cross his mind that Deshmukh's appointment would provide undue advantage to the RSS in leveraging the agitation. So deep was JP's faith in the 'words of honour' by the Jan Sangh-RSS leadership.

The RSS took full advantage of this and spread their tentacles. The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi

Parishad (ABVP), the student wing of the RSS, was used to penetrate the student movement through the Lok Sangharsh Samiti route. When the Janata Party was in power at the Centre, the RSS was making secret attempts to establish a hold on the party and implement its divisive agenda in the country. In this direction, the Jan Sangh was conducting parallel meetings and discussions. The RSS is an organisation which is expert at scheming against others. Therefore, it was difficult to face them from within. It is no wonder that the founders of the Janata Party thought that instead of handing over their party to the RSS, it was better to dissolve it.

JP was extremely anguished with the Sanghis portraying him as their patriarch and a fascist. For this, they used an innocuous statement made by him at a Jan Sangh–RSS rally out of context. He was aware of the sinister conspiracies and intrigues indulged in by the RSS and Sanjay Gandhi to destabilise the Morarji Desai Government and demolish the Janata Party.

The intermediary used for the purpose was Kapil Mohan, head of the Mohan Meakin Group (based in Solan, Himachal Pradesh), best known for its assorted liquor—whiskies, beer, and rum. He had actively abetted in the conspiracy hatched by Raj Narain and Sanjay Gandhi to topple the government, which was losing its equilibrium due to its inherent ideological contradictions.

It was at Kapil Mohan's New Delhi residence that Raj Narain and Sanjay Gandhi held more than a dozen meetings over lavishly hosted lunches and high teas. The Mohan family was extremely close to

Indira Gandhi and, simultaneously, to Raj Narain, Nanaji Deshmukh, and Atal Behari Vajpayee. Shortly after Indira Gandhi lost power in 1977, she summoned Kapil Mohan to her house and expressed concern regarding the safety of her younger son, Sanjay Gandhi. Consequently, Sanjay was surreptitiously shifted to Summerhall, the Mohan Meakin guest house in Solan, where he stayed for nearly a month in the company of Kapil's nephew Anil Bali.

The industrialist was again summoned by Indira Gandhi to be briefed about the highly egoistic personalities of Morarji Desai, Jagjivan Ram and Charan Singh and told him to work on ways and means of creating a wedge in the government. Raj Narain, who was the Health Minister and a frequent visitor to the Mohan residence, was selected as the man who could execute the near impossible task. He was chosen because of his closeness to Charan Singh who nursed ambitions to become the Prime Minister. Shanta Kumar, the RSS–Jan Sangh Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh, was at hand to facilitate.

Several meetings between Raj Narain and Sanjay Gandhi followed in the presence of Kapil Mohan. As part of the strategy, Raj Narain was asked to rake up the 'dual-membership' issue and demand that erstwhile members of the Jana Sangh should sever links with the RSS. At his instance, Charan Singh quickly raised this bogey, asking for the removal of Jan Sangh–RSS members from the Desai government. The boat began to rock and Indira Gandhi goaded Charan Singh to take over as PM, promising him outside support.

Charan Singh finally took over

as the PM but could not garner sufficient numbers to face Parliament and resigned within weeks. Elections followed in 1980 and Indira Gandhi returned to power. Kapil Mohan also played a significant role in softening the RSS towards the Congress, resulting in Balasaheb Deoras extending his organisation's covert support to the Congress in the 1980 parliamentary polls "in the interest of the nation".

Janata Party did not recover from this body-blow and faded away, except for a few sparks here and there! JP was inconsolable when he narrated the account of this 'betrayal most foul'. The hard-boiled revolutionary, who was a foot-soldier for the Mahatma in his fight for India's first freedom and who almost single-handedly won India's second freedom, was a sad man when he died of a broken heart weeks later on October 8, 1979, with a sinking sense that he has 'failed the nation again'!

An unreleased 'telefilm'

JP passed away in October 1979 and the Congress returned to power in January 1980. Despite being a crucial chapter of India's post-Independence history, the JP Movement and the Emergency have been blacked-out from school-texts, books, forums, media and other avenues. Neither the Congress nor the BJP have been disinterested in perpetuating the memory of JP and, in fact, have been suppressing it. Even during JP's birth centenary year (2002–03), when the BJP was in power at the centre, the government did practically nothing to commemorate or celebrate it. It was only some followers / associates of JP, including me, who convened at Wardha Ashram and tried to do

what we could.

Here is a personal experience of BJP's callous attitude towards celebrating JP's birth centenary. During the time when Vajpayee was the Prime Minister, Yashwant Sinha was the Union Finance Minister, whom I personally knew. We had been colleagues in the IAS. Being from Bihar, he claimed very close proximity to JP and left the IAS in 1984 to join the Janata Party to carry on the 'unfinished tasks of JP'. I, too, left the IAS in 1985 and associated myself with the fledgling Janata Party in Tamil Nadu. We formed into a small group and moved with Chandra Shekar who became Prime Minister for a short period. When both of them came to Chennai few months later, they had breakfast with me at my house. Sometime in mid-nineties Yashwant defected to the BJP and became its spokesperson. Since then his ascendancy was rapid.

Sometime in 2002, when I called him with a view to discuss the JP centenary celebrations, he initially tried to avoid me. Since I kept persisting, he agreed to meet me for a few minutes at his imposing office in the North Block. The moment I took up the subject, his facial expression changed and showed total disinterest. Obviously, he was under direction from the BJP or the RSS not to entertain the matter, even from a 'friend'. I did not want to embarrass him and quickly left without even touching the cup of tea placed before me.

In Memoriam

There is a saying that the saddest thing about betrayal is that it never comes from one's enemies, but only from friends. For JP, it came from his 'friends' and 'followers' whom he had brought to the mainstream

from wilderness and facing political extinction. For these worthies, there is a couplet in the Tamil classic 'Thirukkural' written by the legendary Thiruvalluvar: "Ennandri Kondraarkkum Uyvundaam Uyvillai Seynandri Kondra Makarku." It means: "Those who have lost their virtue may yet have salvation; but there is no salvation for those who are ungrateful." JP was the victim of such ungratefulness and betrayal.

The betrayal has continued till this day and the present government at the Centre headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has proclaimed JP as his icon, is acting totally opposite to everything JP lived and died for—freedom, liberty, civil rights, communal harmony, power to the people, decentralised democracy, and democratic governance.

But then the battles continue—"For when the One Great Scorer comes to score against your name, He writes not that you won or lost, but how you played the game!" God as my witness, I dare say that JP might have lost the game, but he played fair and brave to the best of his capacity, thereby enriching the nation and redeeming its democracy and freedom. Let us never ever forget the struggles and sacrifices of this great son of India. Indeed, JP has proved Leo Tolstoy's famous dictum: "It is by those who have suffered that the world has been advanced."

For JP, there cannot be a better epitaph than the one written by his ageing Australian friends Allan and Wendy Scarfe in their book Remembering Jayaprakash: "We have written this memoir to share the privilege of knowing Jayaprakash, to bring alive the warm, charming, gentle, sweet man we knew. . . . Not everyone's personal life matches

the nobility of his ideas. But Jayaprakash's did. . . . His ideas were creative, compassionate, original and powerful. But the man in his courage, integrity and humanity was greater still."

Such a man deserves our tribute in the manner of Rudyard Kipling in the Poem Recessional (1897):

*The tumult and the shouting dies;
The Captains and the Kings depart:
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,
An, humble and a contrite heart.
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!*

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Mahila Samvad Yatra: Sabarmati to Srinagar

20 October to 1 November 2018

The world is celebrating Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary. And this is not just because of the calendar, but because of his contributions to mankind. He gave an alternate perspective to human civilisation and a unique way to fight injustice. To the world, driven by the idea of might against right, Gandhi propagated sympathy and compassion. His mode of struggle proved that the world can be made a better place for all, even when you are fighting for a cause.

For the Mahatma, each and every human being was an agent of change, but he considered women to be the natural soldiers of his struggle. He believed that they possess the qualities and force of unbelievable strength that replaces violence with self-sacrifice. Even the Satyagraha in South Africa had women at the centre of it. This aspect of Gandhian movement demands more attention than has been given till date.

In this light, the idea of a Samvad Yatra Or the Bridges of dialogue tour by an all women team to pay tribute to Gandhi in his 150th Birth Anniversary year was thus born. The Gandhian youth organisation Rashtriya Yuva Sangathan took the initiative and formulated the program. Gandhi: 150 platform created under the leadership of national Gandhian organisations provided the all-round support for its execution.

Around 25 women from various organisations and background showed interest in the yatra. The preparations began in March 2018. It was decided that the Yatra would be conducted from 19th to 31st October. A one-day training program was organised on 19th October at

Gujarat Vidyapeeth in Ahmedabad, a university that was established by the Mahatma himself.

Most of the participants of the yatra were also activists and believed in the core values of democracy, were against communalism and had set ideas of how the socio-economic-political order of the society should be. The core content of the yatra was that the bridges of dialogue are collapsing amongst citizens, sometimes in the name of religion or caste, sometimes in the name of a nation or political party, or at times on gender issues. These cracks have appeared within our homes also. Hence this team was traveling to create the bridges of dialogue—revive the process of dialogues between our families, relationships and the society.

We decided to ask questions without pointing fingers. Is it possible for a scared, uneducated, exploited and half dead woman to make a healthy family or a strong society? Can a relationship between a scary boy and a timid girl sustain? Does the solution lie in killing, humiliating and raping women of our society? Or is it in ending the gender based wrong practices, giving her a legit space and in helping to create an independent human being out of a girl. The Yatra aimed to inspire and generate confidence in girls, sensitise boys and girls towards each other's point of view, and change the outlook of the society towards the man–woman relationship. The 'only girls' team was symbolic. The reality was that these were the youth of India working to create a society that is both honest and fearless.

The Yatra started from

Ahmedabad, and passing through Shamlaji near the Gujarat–Rajasthan border, Udaypur, Ajmer, Jaipur, Delhi, Karnal, Ambala, Jalandhar, Gurdaspur, Samba, Jammu ended at Srinagar. En-route the team created bridges of dialogue in around 40 schools, colleges, hostels, with around 11,000 students and 1,500 citizens. Citizens meetings were held in villages and towns. Various gatherings organised by local social associations were addressed by the girls. Special efforts were made by the yatrīs to make the discussion interesting, interactive and thought provoking. The team carried a laptop and portable projector, on which photographs of thousands of known and unknown women who participated in the freedom struggle as well as Gandhiji's quotations on the subject were shown. The presentation challenged the traditional conception of bravery that is associated with physical strength, weapons and wars. Boys from the audience saw how women faced the brute police purely on the basis of moral strength. Girls from the audience were inspired to rise above self and recognise the rich heritage of women who fought for the freedom of the country.

The all-women team was unique and got a wholehearted welcome even by groups that are conservative towards gender issues. The media also responded well to the yatra. The Yatrīs sold literature, mainly books by Gandhi, worth around Rs 40,000. People also generously contributed to the Yatra expenses: of the total budget of around 2 lakh, the yatrīs collected around Rs 60,000 through donations during the Yatra.

Statement by Religious Liberty Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of India

Uttar Pradesh Tops List of States Targeting Christians in India

The Religious Liberty Commission of Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFIRLC) expresses serious concern on the systematic targeting of the Christian community in Uttar Pradesh, especially in the last two months. According to the documentation compiled and available with the RLC, there has been a sharp rise in incidents of violence and targeted hate against the Christian minority in the state this year.

The state of Uttar Pradesh is the most populous state of India and is home to almost 17% of the total population of the nation. Christians make up 0.18% of the total population of the state. The state is currently led by Yogi Adityanath, who along with being the Chief Minister, is also the high priest of the Gorakhnath temple situated in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh.

EFIRLC appeals to the Government of Uttar Pradesh, particularly the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, to restore the confidence of the Christian community by enforcing law and order and through exemplary punishment to communal elements who attack peaceful Churches and worship services on flimsy and made up charges.

Since the Christmas Season is fast approaching, we appeal to the Chief Minister to ensure that Churches are given adequate security so that the community can observe the festival of love and universal hope in peace.

EFIRLC also appeals to the Home Minister Mr. Rajnath Singh and the Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi to take note of the situation not

only in Uttar Pradesh but across the country and take measures to curb impunity and to ensure the rule of law.

The months of September and October 2018 have been particularly troublesome and have witnessed the maximum number of incidents in the state. September saw 28 incidents while 16 incidents were recorded in October.

Last year RLC documented 50 incidents of targeted hate and violence against Christians in the state of Uttar Pradesh, which was in itself a high figure in comparison with the past years. However, this year till October alone the number of incidents recorded in the state are 64 and counting.

The origin and epicentre of this systematic campaign was the district of Jaunpur located in the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh. Jaunpur is about 60 kilometres from Varanasi, the parliamentary constituency of Mr. Narendra Modi. Starting from Jaunpur the incidents have also spread across other districts including: Azamgarh, Pratapgarh, Siddharth Nagar, Barabanki, Ghazipur, Gorakhpur, Agra, Kanpur and Varanasi.

Churches have been targeted by right-wing groups and the police alike using the convenient allegation of “conversions through force or fraud”. The media has seemingly become a willing partner with political elements who are leading the assault from the front.

Both the police and the right-wing mobs have been disrupting worship services and harassing the

worshippers. Videos have surfaced on social media, in which the police are seen blocking roads and discouraging people from attending worship services and asking them to go away. Right-wing mobs have beaten up pastors and misbehaved with people who come for Church meetings and have indulged in vandalism. A large disinformation campaign is accompanying the targeting of the Churches and the primary vehicles of it is the vernacular press, the electronic media as well as the social media.

Many Pastors and Christians have also been arrested or detained on the pretext of investigation. Many of the arrests have been in the late evening or even after midnight and have been a source of harassment rather than help for Christians who are already under much pressure because of opposition from Hindu right-wing groups.

The documentation for the months of September and October 2018 also includes incidents of violence and targeted hate against Christians that have taken place in other states of India and the total number of incidents recorded for these two months stands at 71, with 44 incidents recorded from Uttar Pradesh, 6 from Jharkhand, 4 from Tamil Nadu, 3 each from Bihar and Telangana, 2 each in the states of Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, and West Bengal and one incident each in the states of Jammu and Kashmir, Assam and Madhya Pradesh. A total of 195 incidents have been documented from January 2018 till October 2018.

Pentagon Socialism: Militarising the Economy in the Name of Defense

William D. Hartung

Given his erratic behavior, from daily Twitter eruptions to upping his tally of lies by the hour, it's hard to think of Donald Trump as a man with a plan. But in at least one area—reshaping the economy to serve the needs of the military–industrial complex—he's (gasp!) a socialist in the making.

His plan is now visibly taking shape—one we can see and assess thanks to a Pentagon-led study with a distinctly tongue-twisting title: “Assessing and Strengthening the Manufacturing and Defense Industrial Base and Supply Chain Resiliency of the United States.” The analysis is the brainchild of Trump's adviser for trade and manufacturing policy, Peter Navarro, who also happens to be the key architect of the president's trade wars.

Navarro, however, can hardly take sole credit for the administration's latest economic plan, since the lead agency for developing it was also the most interested of all in the project, the Pentagon itself, in particular its Office of Defense Industrial Policy. In addition, those producing the report did so in coordination with an alphabet soup of other agencies from the Department of Commerce to the Director of National Intelligence. And even that's not all. It's also the product of an “inter-agency task force” made up of 16 working groups and 300 “subject matter” experts, supplemented by over a dozen industry “listening sessions” with outfits like the National Defense Industrial Association, an advocacy

organisation that represents 1,600 companies in the defense sector.

Before jumping into its substance and implications for the American economy and national defense, let me pause a moment to mention two other small matters.

First, were you aware that the Pentagon even had an Office of Defense Industrial Policy? It sounds suspiciously like the kind of government organisation that engages in economic planning, a practice anathema not just to Republicans but to many Democrats as well. The only reason it's not a national scandal—complete with Fox News banner headlines about the end of the American way of life as we know it and the coming of creeping socialism—is because it's part of the one institution that has always been exempt from the dictates of the “free market”: the Department of Defense.

Second, how about those 300 subject matter experts? Since when does Donald Trump consult subject matter experts? Certainly not on climate change, the most urgent issue facing humanity and one where expert opinion is remarkably unified. The Pentagon and its contractors should, however, be thought of as the ultimate special interest group and with that status comes special treatment. And if that means consulting 300 such experts to make sure their “needs” are met, so be it.

A Slogan for the Ages?

Now for the big stuff.

According to Peter Navarro's

summary of the new industrial base report, which appeared as an op-ed in the New York Times, the key to the Trump plan is the president's belief that “economic security equals national security.” When it comes to weapons manufacturing, the administration's approach involves building a Fortress America economy that will depend as little as possible on foreign suppliers. Consider it just the latest variation on Trump's “America First” economic strategy, grounded in its unapologetic embrace of nationalism. As a slogan, “economic security equals national security” doesn't have quite the populist ring of “Make America Great Again,” but it's part of the same worldview.

In a flight of grandiosity (and flattery) that must have made his boss swell with pride, Navarro suggested in his op-ed that the slogan might go down in the annals of history alongside other famed pearls of presidential wisdom. As he put it:

McKinley's . . . ‘Patriotism, protection and prosperity’ . . . catalyzed strong economic growth. Roosevelt's ‘Speak softly and carry a big stick’ helped transform the Navy into a military force capable of projecting power around the world. And Reagan's ‘Peace through strength’ inspired an unprecedented rebuilding of the military that brought the Soviet Union to its knees. . . . History will judge whether Donald Trump's ‘economic security is national security’ joins the ranks of great presidential maxims.

The essence of the Pentagon's

scheme for making America safe for a never-ending policy of war preparations (and war) is to organise as much of the economy as possible around the needs of military production. This would involve eliminating what Navarro describes as the “300 vulnerabilities” of the defense economy—from reliance on single suppliers for key components in weapons systems and the like, to dependence on foreign inputs like rare earth minerals from China, to a shortage of younger workers with the skills and motivation needed to keep America’s massive weapons manufacturing machine up and running. China figures prominently in the report’s narrative, with its trade and investment policies repeatedly described as “economic aggression.”

And needless to say, this being the Pentagon, one of the biggest desires expressed in the report is a need for—yes, you guessed it!—more money. Never mind that the United States already spends more on its military than the next seven nations in the world combined (five of whom are US allies). Never mind that the increase in Pentagon spending over the past two years is larger than the entire military budget of Russia. Never mind that, despite pulling tens of thousands of troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan, this country’s spending on the Pentagon and related programs (like nuclear warhead work at the Department of Energy) will hit \$716 billion in fiscal year 2019, one of the highest levels ever. Face it, say the Pentagon and its allies on Capitol Hill, the US won’t be able to build a reliable, all-weapons-all-the-time economic-industrial base without spending yet more taxpayer dollars. Think of this as a “Pentagon First” strategy.

As it happens, the Pentagon

chose the wrong 300 experts. The new plan, reflecting their collective wisdom, is an economic and security disaster in the making.

Consider it beyond irony that some of the same experts and organisations now suggesting that we bet America’s future on pumping up the most inefficient sector of our economy—no, no, I didn’t mean the coal industry, I meant the military-industrial complex—are conservative experts who criticised the Soviet Union for the very same thing. They still claim that it imploded largely because Washington cleverly lured its leaders into devoting ever more of their resources to the military sector. That, they insist, reinforced a rigidity in the Soviet system which made it virtually impossible for it to adapt to a rapidly changing global economic landscape.

Our military buildup, they still fervently believe, bankrupted the Soviet Union. Other analysts, like the historian Lawrence Wittner, have questioned such a view. But for the sake of consistency, shouldn’t conservatives who claimed that excessive military spending did in the Soviets be worried that President Trump’s policy of massive tax cuts for the rich, increased Pentagon spending, and trade wars with adversaries and allies alike might do something similar to the United States?

What Would a Real Industrial Policy Look Like?

Industrial policy should not be a dirty word. The problem is: the Pentagon shouldn’t be in charge of it. The goal of an effective industrial policy should be to create well-paying jobs, especially in sectors that meet pressing national needs

like rebuilding America’s crumbling infrastructure and developing alternative energy technologies that can help address the urgent dangers posed by climate change.

The biggest economic challenge facing the United States today is how to organise an economic transition that would replace jobs and income generated by dysfunctional activities like overspending on the Pentagon and subsidising polluting industries. The argument that the Pentagon is crucial to jobs production in America has been instrumental in blocking constructive changes that would benefit both the environment and true American security. Members of Congress are, for example, afraid to jettison questionable weapons programs like the F-35 combat aircraft—an immensely costly, underperforming fighter plane that may never be ready for combat—for fear of reducing jobs in their states or districts. (The same is true of the coal and petroleum industries, which endlessly play up the supposed job-creating benefits of their activities.)

Where could alternatives to Pentagon job-creation programs come from? The short answer is: invest in virtually anything but buying more weapons and waging more wars and Americans will be better off. For instance, Pentagon spending creates startlingly fewer jobs per dollar than putting the same taxpayer dollars into infrastructure repair and rebuilding, alternative energy creation, education, or health care. A study conducted by University of Massachusetts economist Heidi Garrett-Peltier for the Costs of War Project at Brown University found that, had the government invested in civilian activities the \$230 billion per year wasted on America’s post-9/11

wars, that sum would have created 1.3 million additional jobs. A more equitable tax policy that required wealthy individuals and corporations to pay their fair share could similarly fund a \$2 trillion infrastructure program that would support 2.5 million new jobs in its first year, according to a proposal put forward by the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

As for the president's much touted, dramatically overblown claims about the jobs to be had from arms exports, the global arms market represents only a tiny fraction of the growing market for renewable energy technologies. If the goal is to produce jobs via exports, developing technologies to tap the huge future market in renewables, which one study suggests could hit \$2.1 trillion by 2025, would leave weapons systems in the dust. After all, that's about 20 times the current size of the total global arms trade, which clocks in at about \$100 billion annually. But an analysis by Miriam Pemberton and her colleagues at the Institute for Policy Studies indicates that the United States spends 28 times as much on its military as it does on genuinely job-creating programs designed to address the threat of climate change.

Such actions would be a good start—but just a start—when it comes to reducing the dependency of the United States economy on guns and pollution. Of course, the Trump administration doesn't have the faintest interest in any of this. (It would apparently rather cede the lucrative future market in renewable energy to China, with barely a fight.)

Still, the question remains: What would such a shift in priorities mean for the defense industrial base? If you accept the premise that the US

government needs to run a permanent war economy (and also fight never-ending wars across a significant swath of the planet), some of the Pentagon's recommendations might almost make sense. But a foreign policy that put more emphasis on diplomacy—one that also thought it important to address non-military dangers like climate change—wouldn't require such a large military production network in the first place. Under this scenario, the alarmist argument that the US won't be able to defend itself without stepping up the militarisation of our already exceedingly militarised economy suddenly becomes unpersuasive.

But let's give the weapons sector some credit. Its CEOs are working assiduously to build up local economies—overseas. Saudi Arabia's long-term economic plan, for instance, calls for 50% of the value of its weapons purchases to be spent on building up its own military industry. US weapons giants like Raytheon and Lockheed Martin have been quick to pledge allegiance to that plan, setting up subsidiaries there and agreeing to have systems like helicopters assembled in Saudi Arabia, not the United States. Meanwhile, Lockheed Martin is helping the United Arab Emirates develop the capability to produce robot-controlled machine tools that are in great demand in the defense and aerospace industries. And the F-35 program is creating production jobs in more than a dozen countries, including assembly plants in Italy and Japan.

Raytheon CEO Thomas Kennedy summed up this approach when he discussed his company's growing partnership with Saudi Arabia: "By working together, we can help build world-class defense and cyber

capabilities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia." And keep in mind that these are the jobs from so many of those Saudi weapons sales that President Trump keeps bragging about. Of course, while this may be bad news for American jobs, it works just fine as a strategy for keeping the profits of US arms makers stratospheric.

Making the transition from Peter Navarro's "economic security equals national security" to an economy far less dependent on over-the-top military spending would mean a major shift in budget priorities in Washington, a prospect that is, at the moment, hard to imagine. But if the Pentagon can plan ahead, why shouldn't the rest of us?

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Bernie Sanders to Launch International Progressive Front Against the Far-Right

United States Left-leaning politician Bernie Sanders, and former Greek finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis have announced the formation of an international progressive movement. The initiative, announced in October, is set to combat the rise of an “authoritarian axis” and “The Movement,” a far-right nationalist front with an international reach. Brazil’s Fernando Haddad, the former 2018 presidential candidate of the Workers’ Party, has been invited to join the initiative. According to media reports, Haddad has confirmed his participation.

“All around the world, in Europe, in Russia, in the Middle East, in Asia and elsewhere we are seeing movements led by demagogues who exploit people’s fears, prejudices and grievances to achieve and hold on to power,” Sanders said in an article for *The Guardian* (re-published in this issue of *Janata*).

The far-right threat, the “The Movement”, was formed in 2017 by Belgian right-wing politician, Mischael Modrikamen. It has been gaining publicity since Steve Bannon, former White House chief strategist for the Trump administration, joined him. Bannon and Modrikamen

announced a plan to launch the organization with an inaugural summit in Bruxelles, January 2019.

Sanders says the far-right regimes, like those of United States President Donald Trump and others supported by “The Movement”, share distinct characteristics such as a “hostility toward democratic norms, antagonism toward a free press, intolerance toward ethnic and religious minorities, and a belief that government should benefit their own selfish financial interest.”

Sanders and Varoufakis’s counter-initiative is set to launch Dec. 1, 2018 in New York. “Our task is not unprecedented,” Varoufakis writes.

“Fascists did not come to power in the mid-war period by promising violence, war or concentration camps. They came to power by addressing good people . . . looked at them in the eye and promised to restore their pride. . . . gave them a sense that they belonged to a larger ideal, while inventing a threat of a lurking ‘alien’ who threatened their revived hope,” he says.

The Us-versus-Them tactic Varoufakis cites can be seen in the United States President Donald Trump’s rhetoric around immigrants

from Central America and in Brazil's President-elect's treatment of Afrolatinos.

"Our era will be remembered for the triumphant march of a globally

unifying rightwing—a Nationalist International—that sprang out of the cesspool of financialised capitalism," Varoufakis writes in his blog. "Whether it will also

be remembered for a successful humanist challenge to this menace depends on the willingness of progressives."

Courtesy: Telesur

For an International Progressive Front

Bernie Sanders

There is a global struggle taking place of enormous consequence. Nothing less than the future of the planet—economically, socially and environmentally—is at stake.

At a time of massive wealth and income inequality, when the world's top 1% now owns more wealth than the bottom 99%, we are seeing the rise of a new authoritarian axis.

While these regimes may differ in some respects, they share key attributes: hostility toward democratic norms, antagonism toward a free press, intolerance toward ethnic and religious minorities, and a belief that governments should benefit their own selfish financial interests. These leaders are also deeply connected to a network of multi-billionaire oligarchs who see the world as their economic plaything.

Those of us who believe in democracy, who believe that a government must be accountable to its people, must understand the scope of this challenge if we are to effectively confront it.

It should be clear by now that Donald Trump and the rightwing movement that supports him is not a phenomenon unique to the United States. All around the world, in Europe, in Russia, in the Middle East, in Asia and elsewhere we are seeing movements led by demagogues who exploit people's fears, prejudices and grievances to achieve and hold on to power.

This trend certainly did not begin with Trump, but there's no question that authoritarian leaders around the world have drawn inspiration from the fact that the leader of the world's oldest and most powerful democracy seems to delight in shattering democratic norms.

Three years ago, who would have imagined that the United States would stay neutral between Canada, our democratic neighbor and second largest trading partner, and Saudi Arabia, a monarchic, client state that treats women as third-class citizens? It's also hard to imagine that Israel's Netanyahu government would have moved to pass the recent "nation state law", which essentially codifies the second-class status of Israel's non-Jewish citizens, if Benjamin Netanyahu didn't know Trump would have his back.

All of this is not exactly a secret. As the US continues to grow further and further apart from our longtime democratic allies, the US ambassador to Germany recently made clear the Trump administration's support for rightwing extremist parties across Europe.

In addition to Trump's hostility toward democratic institutions we have a billionaire president who, in an unprecedented way, has blatantly embedded his own economic interests and those of his cronies into the policies of government.

Other authoritarian states are

much farther along this kleptocratic process. In Russia, it is impossible to tell where the decisions of government end and the interests of Vladimir Putin and his circle of oligarchs begin. They operate as one unit. Similarly, in Saudi Arabia, there is no debate about separation because the natural resources of the state, valued at trillions of dollars, belong to the Saudi royal family. In Hungary, far-right authoritarian leader Viktor Orbán is openly allied with Putin in Russia. In China, an inner circle led by Xi Jinping has steadily consolidated power, clamping down on domestic political freedom while it aggressively promotes a version of authoritarian capitalism abroad.

We must understand that these authoritarians are part of a common front. They are in close contact with each other, share tactics and, as in the case of European and American rightwing movements, even share some of the same funders. The Mercer family, for example, supporters of the infamous Cambridge Analytica (a British political consulting firm), have been key backers of Trump and of Breitbart News (a far-right syndicated American news, opinion and commentary website), which operates in Europe, the United States and Israel to advance the same anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim agenda. Republican megadonor Sheldon Adelson gives generously to rightwing causes in both the

United States and Israel, promoting a shared agenda of intolerance and illiberalism in both countries.

The truth is, however, that to effectively oppose rightwing authoritarianism, we cannot simply go back to the failed status quo of the last several decades. Today in the United States, and in many other parts of the world, people are working longer hours for stagnating wages, and worry that their children will have a lower standard of living than they do.

Our job is to fight for a future in which new technology and innovation works to benefit all people, not just a few. It is not acceptable that the top 1% of the world's population owns half the planet's wealth, while the bottom 70% of the working age population accounts for just 2.7% of global wealth.

Together governments of the world must come together to end the absurdity of the rich and multinational corporations stashing over \$21 trillion in offshore bank accounts to avoid paying their fair share of taxes and then demanding that their respective governments impose an austerity agenda on their working families.

It is not acceptable that the fossil fuel industry continues to make huge profits while their carbon emissions destroy the planet for our children and grandchildren.

It is not acceptable that a handful of multinational media giants, owned by a small number of billionaires, largely control the flow of information on the planet.

It is not acceptable that trade policies that benefit large multinational corporations and encourage a race to the bottom hurt working people throughout the world as they are written out of

public view.

It is not acceptable that, with the cold war long behind us, countries around the world spend over \$1 trillion a year on weapons of destruction, while millions of children die of easily treatable diseases.

In order to effectively combat the rise of the international authoritarian axis, we need an international progressive movement that mobilises behind a vision of shared prosperity, security and dignity for all people, and that addresses the massive global inequality that exists, not only in wealth but in political power.

Such a movement must be willing to think creatively and boldly about the world that we would like to see. While the authoritarian axis is committed to tearing down a post-second world war global order that they see as limiting their access to power and wealth, it is not enough for us to simply defend that order as it exists now.

We must look honestly at how that order has failed to deliver on many of its promises, and how authoritarians have adeptly exploited those failures in order to build support for their agenda. We must take the opportunity to reconceptualise a genuinely progressive global order based on human solidarity, an order that recognises that every person on this planet shares a common humanity, that we all want our children to grow up healthy, to have a good education, have decent jobs, drink clean water, breathe clean air and live in peace.

Our job is to reach out to those in every corner of the world who share these values, and who are fighting for a better world.

In a time of exploding wealth and technology, we have the potential to create a decent life for all people.

Our job is to build on our common humanity and do everything that we can to oppose all of the forces, whether unaccountable government power or unaccountable corporate power, who try to divide us up and set us against each other. We know that those forces work together across borders. We must do the same.

Yanis Varoufakis' (former Greek finance minister) comments on Bernie Sanders' piece:

Bernie Sanders is spot-on. Financiers have long formed an international "brotherhood" to guarantee themselves international bailouts when their paper pyramids crash.

More recently, xenophobic rightwing zealots also formed their very own Nationalist International, turning once proud people against another so that they control their wealth and politics.

It is high time that Democrats from across the world form a Progressive International in the interests of a majority of people on every continent, in every country.

Sanders is also right when he says that the solution is not to go back to a status quo whose spectacular failure has paved the ground for the rise of the Nationalist International.

Our Progressive International must lead with a vision of the green, shared prosperity that human ingenuity is capable of providing—as long as democracy is given a chance to enable it.

To that end we need to do more than campaign together. Let us form a common council that draws out a common blueprint for an International New Deal, a progressive New Bretton Woods.

The Long Search for Killers of 1984 Sikh Massacre

Shamsul Islam

For last 34 years, on every anniversary of 1984 massacre of Sikhs, this author has been reminding the Nation how Indian State and judiciary did not bother to punish the perpetrators of this horrendous mass killing of the innocents of the second largest religious minority of our country. On every anniversary the author hoped that by next year, justice would be done and he would not have to write the painful story once again as reminder. Another year has gone by; the saga of the criminal betrayal by the Indian Republic continues.

Betrayal by Governments till 2014

After giving free run to the killer gangs, the government appointed a one-man Marwah Commission to find out the perpetrators of the 1984 'riots'. As this exercise was proving inconvenient, it was asked to disband itself within a short period of its existence and a sitting Supreme Court Judge Ranga Nath Mishra was asked to conduct an inquiry into the 1984 'riots'. He submitted his report in 1987. Shockingly, this fact finding (or fact-hiding) commission headed by Misra observed that "the riots which had a spontaneous origin later attained a channelised method at the hands of gangsters."

The 'apostle of justice', Mishra, was not able to find out from where these gangsters came! According to Jarnail Singh, author of the book *I Accuse: The Anti-Sikh Violence of 1984*, for this service to the State, Justice Mishra was awarded a berth in the Rajya Sabha.

Over the next two decades,

not less than nine commissions of inquiry were instituted. For the Indian State it became routine to announce the constitution of some new commission or some more compensation to the families of the victims in order to deflect the mounting anger at the times of elections. Highlighting the anti-minority bias of such commissions, H.S. Phoolka, a renowned lawyer, commented that instead of getting convicted many of the political perpetrators get promoted as rulers.

In the latest development, the Supreme Court of India on August 16, 2017 ordered the constitution of a panel comprising two of its former judges to examine the justification for closing 241 anti-Sikh riot cases probed by SIT and give its report within the next 3 months. *It is November 2018, 15 months have gone by since the order was passed, and these three months are yet to be over!*

Betrayal by the Present RSS-BJP Rulers

The RSS claims to have always stood for Hindu-Sikh unity. It occasionally expresses its gratitude to Sikhism for saving Hinduism from Muslim aggression. It may not be irrelevant to note here that the RSS does not treat Sikhism as an independent religion which discarded casteism and Brahmanical hegemony, but considers it to be a part of Hinduism. The RSS-BJP leaders have repeatedly blamed the Congress for the 1984 anti-Sikh violence. While addressing a public rally during the last parliamentary

elections in Jhansi, UP (October 25, 2013), Modi asked Congress leaders to explain who "killed thousands of Sikhs in 1984" and "has anyone been convicted for the Sikh genocide so far". Modi during the Punjab elections and 2014 general elections kept on referring to 'qatl-e-aam' or genocide of Sikhs.

After becoming PM, Modi in a message (October 31, 2014) said that the anti-Sikh riots in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination were like a "dagger that pierced through India's chest. . . . Our own people were murdered, the attack was not on a particular community but on the entire nation."

Hindutva icon, RSS whole-timer and PM Modi lamented the fact that culprits were yet to be booked and tried for this massacre. However, Modi did not tell the nation what NDA governments which ruled this country from 1998 to 2004 did to persecute the culprits. Modi also forgot to share the fact that as per the autobiography of L.K. Advani (page 430), it was his party which pushed Indira Gandhi to go for army action, infamously named as 'Operation Blue Star', which killed large number of Sikh pilgrims.

Renowned journalist Manoj Mitta, author of the book *When a Tree Shook Delhi: The 1984 Carnage and its Aftermath* straight forwardly says that:

Despite the BJP rule, there has hardly been any will to enforce accountability for the massacres that took place under the Congress. It's as if there is a tacit deal between the sponsors of 1984 and 2002.

A perusal of contemporary RSS documents reveals that the major focus of the RSS in the days following the 1984 genocide was on condemning Sikh extremism, eulogising Indira Gandhi and welcoming the crowning of Rajiv Gandhi as the new prime minister after Indira Gandhi's murder.

RSS Ideologue's Dehumanised Attitude Towards Sikh Massacre

The most important proof of such a dehumanised attitude towards the massacre of Sikhs is a document circulated by Nana Deshmukh, a prominent whole timer and an ideologue of the RSS. This document titled *Moments of Soul Searching* was circulated by Deshmukh on November 8, 1984. In this document, Nana Deshmukh justifies the massacre of the Sikh community in 1984.

This document also shows the true degenerated and fascist attitude of the RSS towards all the minorities of India. The RSS has been arguing that they are against Muslims and Christians because they are the followers of foreign religions. Here we find them justifying the butchering of Sikhs who according to their own categorisation are the followers of an indigenous religion.

This document was published in the Hindi Weekly *Pratipaksh* (edited by George Fernandes, who later became the Defence Minister of India in the NDA regime) in its edition of November 25, 1984 under the title "Indira Congress-RSS collusion" with the following editorial comment:

"The author of the following document is known as an ideologue and policy formulator of the RSS. After the killing of Prime Minister (Indira Gandhi) he distributed

this document among prominent politicians. It has a historical significance. That is why we have decided to publish it, violating the policy of our weekly. This document highlights the new affinities developing between the Indira Congress and the RSS. We produce here the Hindi translation of the document."

Here is a brief summary of Deshmukh's defence of the 1984 carnage:

1. The massacre of Sikhs was not the handiwork of any group or anti-social elements but the result of a genuine feeling of anger.
2. Deshmukh did not distinguish the action of the two security personnel of Indira Gandhi, who happened to be Sikhs, from that of the whole Sikh community. According to his document, the killers of Indira Gandhi were working under some kind of mandate from their community.
3. Sikhs themselves invited these attacks, thus advancing the Congress theory of justifying the massacre of the Sikhs.
4. He glorified Operation Blue Star and described any opposition to it as anti-national. When Sikhs were being killed in thousands, he was warning the country of Sikh extremism, thus offering ideological defense of those killings.
5. Sikh community as a whole was responsible for violence in Punjab.
6. Sikhs should have done nothing in self-defence but showed patience and tolerance against the killer mobs.
7. Sikh intellectuals and not killer mobs were responsible for the massacre. They had turned

Sikhs into a militant community, cutting them off from their Hindu roots, thus inviting attacks from nationalist Indians. Moreover, he treated all Sikhs as part of the same gang and described attacks on them as a reaction of the nationalist Hindus.

8. He described Indira Gandhi as the only leader who could keep the country united, and stated that following the assassination of such a great leader, such killings could not be avoided.
9. Rajiv Gandhi, who succeeded Mrs. Gandhi as PM following her killing and justified the nationwide killings of Sikhs by saying, "When a huge tree falls there are always tremors felt", was lauded and blessed by Nana Deshmukh at the end of the document.
10. Shockingly, Deshmukh equates the massacre of Sikhs with the attacks on RSS cadres after the killing of Gandhiji, and so he goes on to advise Sikhs to suffer silently. Everybody knows that the killing of Gandhiji was inspired by the RSS and Hindutva ideology, whereas the common innocent Sikhs had nothing to do with the murder of Indira Gandhi.
11. There is not a single sentence in Deshmukh's document demanding from the then Congress Government at the Centre remedial measures for controlling the violence against the minority community. Remember that Deshmukh had circulated this document on November 8, 1984; it was during the period November 5-10 when the maximum killings of Sikhs took place. Deshmukh was just not concerned about these

killings.

12. It is generally believed that Congress cadres were behind this genocide. This may be true, but there were other forces also which actively participated in this massacre and whose role has never been investigated. This could be one of the reasons why the actual perpetrators remain unknown.

The circulation of this document by Deshmukh did not happen in isolation. It represented the real RSS attitude towards the Sikh genocide of 1984. It may be relevant to know here that RSS cadres did not come forward in defence of the Sikhs. The RSS is very fond of circulating publicity material, especially photographs of its khaki shorts-clad cadres doing social work. For the 1984 violence they have none. Deshmukh's article also makes no mention of RSS cadres going to the rescue of Sikhs under siege.

The RSS English organ, *Organiser* in its combined issue dated November 11 & 18, 1984 carried an editorial titled "Stunning Loss" which praised Indira Gandhi in the following words: "It will always be difficult to believe that Indira Gandhi is no more. One had got so used to hearing her myriad voices for so long, that everything looks so blank without her. The violent manner of her death is the most shocking horror story, giving the nation the creeps. . . It is a case of treacherous fanatics stigmatising the whole nation by butchering a remarkable specimen of Indian womanhood. . . . She literally served India to the last drop of her blood according to her own lights." The same editorial ended with the words supporting newly installed PM, Rajiv Gandhi, who according to it "deserves sympathy

and consideration".

Organiser also carried the statement of RSS supremo, Balasaheb Deoras, titled "Balasaheb condemns assassination, Delhi carnage" in a single column. He mourned and condemned the carnage but not even once referred to the fact that Sikhs were under attack. For him it was "infighting in the Hindu Samaj". According to this statement, "swayamsevaks have been instructed to form or help in forming Mohalla Suraksha Samitis" for restoring peace and rehabilitation of the sufferers. However, there are no documents available in contemporary RSS archives to show how these Samitis functioned. It is a fact that RSS which is fond of displaying photographs of its cadres doing social work has not published any visuals of the activities of these Samitis.

In the above mentioned statement, Deoras reacts to the assassination of Indira Gandhi in the following words, "It is shocking beyond words to express the feelings at the murder of PM Mrs. Indira Gandhi by some fanatic elements. She had been carrying on almost the entire burden of the country since 1966. She was loved and respected not only in this country but all over the world. Her passing away at this critical juncture will create a void in India and also in the world."

The same issue of the *Organiser* also says: "RSS Sarkyavah, Rajender Singh issued instructions to all the branches in the country to hold a special meeting in Shakha condemning the dastardly murder of the PM and paying homage to the departed soul. He also issued instructions to cancel all public functions to be held by RSS during the period of mourning." Of course,

RSS archives do not contain any instructions from RSS top brass ordering RSS cadres to mourn the Sikh martyrs.

So, the search for finding the perpetrators of the Sikh massacre of 1984 continues endlessly. The present RSS-BJP rulers who claim to be co-religionists of Sikhs have proven no different from the Congress. The only hope is that those Indians who have a stake in continuation of democratic-secular Indian polity will come forward to force the Indian State to identify and punish the killers.

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Making of the Indian Constitution

Salil Misra

By and large, it can be said that most constitutions of the world have been made in two different ways—the democratic-consensual way and the elite-bureaucratic way. In the first way the constitution is made by the genuine representatives of the people keeping in mind popular aspirations. In the second way, the constitution is made by the specialists and the experts, keeping in mind the legal and technical points and necessities. The second exercise is necessarily an elite exercise and the accomplishment of a tiny minority. The experts decide in their own wisdom, what is best for the people. The constitution made thus is for the people, but not necessarily *by* the people.

Quite characteristically, Indian constitution was a combination of the two. Both the impulses, the democratic-consensual, and the technical expertise of the specialists, were equally active during the making of Indian constitution. The document carried the mandate of a Constituent Assembly which was a large body consisting of over 300 members who were elected by the representatives of the people from India's central and provincial legislatures. But the choice of the elected representatives was deliberately done in such a way so to bring some of the best constitutional minds into the Assembly. Experts like B.R. Ambedkar, K.T. Shah, K.M. Munshi and N. Gopalaswami Ayyangar were thus brought into the Assembly. Ambedkar's election was ensured by not fielding any

candidate against him from Bombay presidency. Above all the expertise of top Congress leaders—Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Maulana Azad and Rajendra Prasad was constantly pressed into during service during 1946–49 to prepare a blueprint for modern India that would be both, the best and the most representative.

There is no doubt that some of the successes, durability and tenacity of the Indian constitution can be easily attributed to this combination. Indian constitution continues to be a relevant and a vibrant document today, even after sixty years. No fundamental changes have occurred in its structure. In its basic spirit it continues to be the same document that it was in 1950. To fully understand the relevance of this, a comparison with India's neighbours would be instructive. Sri Lanka acquired a constitution immediately after its independence in 1948, through the elite bureaucratic way. In less than five year's time, the constitution was heading towards obsolescence. By now Sri Lanka has had three different constitutions. Pakistan acquired a constitution as late as in 1956, nine years after its birth. The Pakistani constitution too was made by legal experts without seeking any democratic mandate. It was abolished in two years time, in 1958 and was replaced by another constitution in 1962. The second constitution too did not last long and was replaced by yet another one in 1973. In the first three decades of its existence, Pakistan had as many as three different constitutions. The

Indian constitution by comparison has continued uninterrupted and has retained its basic features. Except three major amendments, first, 42nd and 73rd–74th, all the amendments have been in the nature of nuts-and-bolts, without really altering its basic character.

The story of the making of Indian constitution is long and goes back to the beginning of the 20th century. The actual making of the constitution during 1946–49 constitutes a small, though significant part of its long story. The earliest documents resembling a constitution for India were the various Council Acts passed by the British parliament for India as its colony. These Acts enabled the British to rule India. The early nationalist leadership accepted this right of the British and only demanded that better Acts be passed by the British parliament for India. In the 1920s, leaders like Motilal Nehru and C.R. Das added a new dimension to this by insisting that an Indian constitution should be made only by Indians themselves. The Indian leaders followed this demand by actually preparing a full-fledged constitution for India in 1928. It was known as Nehru Report, after Motilal Nehru, one of its architects. Representatives from all the major political parties had participated in preparing this Report.

Nehru Report was a remarkable document. It recommended fundamental rights for the people, a parliamentary form of government, a bi-cameral legislature, universal adult franchise, administrative units

to be formed on linguistic basis and an independent judiciary with a Supreme Court at the apex. None of the British Acts, both before and after the Nehru Report, ever talked about either adult franchise or fundamental rights of the people. The British granted voting rights only to the rich and powerful and did not consider any mention of the fundamental rights of the people at all necessary.

As was to be expected, the British government refused to accept the Nehru Report. Unfortunately, some of the Indian political parties, Muslim League in particular, also withdrew their support. As a result the Nehru Report was reduced to being a mere paper document and not a powerful and vibrant constitutional alternative for a modern India that it was expected to be. Yet if look at the Nehru Report and the Indian constitution closely, we would find that the Indian constitution was profoundly inspired by the Nehru Report. The Report had enlisted 19 human rights of the people, ten of which were included in the Indian constitution.

The next major step towards the making of an Indian constitution was the birth of the idea of a Constituent Assembly in the 1930s. The Nehru Report had been prepared in a conference mode. It was a young Jawahar Lal Nehru who expressed his dissatisfaction with this method of making a constitution. He started insisting from 1933 onwards that an Indian constitution should be prepared by a Constituent Assembly, elected for that purpose, on the basis of the widest franchise possible. The idea of a Constituent Assembly soon began to gather momentum. In 1934, the Congress Working Committee rejected the British constitutional

proposal and resolved that the only satisfactory alternative to the British proposal “is a constitution drawn up by a Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of adult suffrage or as near it as possible.” From this point onwards, the demand for a Constituent Assembly became the linchpin of the demand of the national movement led by Nehru. In an interesting debate between Nehru and Gandhi in Wardha in 1940, while Nehru insisted that the British must first declare India independent and then call for a Constituent Assembly; Gandhi argued that the Assembly should be called first and be left free to decide on the question of independence.

It was as late as in August 1940 that the British government conceded for the first time the idea of a Constituent Assembly. The second world war had broken out and, desperately needing Indian support in the war effort, Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy, declared that the framing of the new constitution should be primarily the responsibility of Indians themselves. The government offered to set up, after the end of the War, a Constituent Assembly consisting of representative Indians. It was still not spelt out how this Assembly would be constituted—by direct or indirect elections, based on adult or a restricted franchise. The proposals in their totality were found to be unsatisfactory and rejected by all the major political parties.

In the meanwhile the War came close to the Indian shores. The possibility of a Japanese invasion of India appeared imminent. Growing increasingly frustrated by the British effort and restless at the thought of India becoming a major site of the War, Indian people under Gandhi’s leadership launched the Quit India

movement in August 1942. A panic stricken British government arrested all Congress leaders and ruthlessly suppressed the movement. Congress was banned, the national movement came to a standstill and all talk of a Constituent Assembly faded into the background.

The end of the War and the victory of the Labour party in the British elections in 1945 once again brought the Constituent Assembly proposal back to life. By this time Indian independence had begun to be seen as inevitable. The question was not whether, but when, India would become free. It was in these circumstances that the Viceroy Lord Wavell, announcing the India policy of the new Labour government, promised to convene a constitution making body for India as soon as possible. The British government declared that a Cabinet Mission would be sent to India to resolve the two questions of freedom for India and constitution making. The Cabinet Mission arrived in March 1946 with a blueprint for both.

It was finally in July–August 1946 that a Constituent Assembly was set up through indirect elections. It was envisaged as a large body consisting of 389 members (296 from British India and 93 from princely states). Initially only the members from British India were included. The first session of the Assembly was held on 9 December 1946. This indeed was a historic day for independent India. Initially only 207 members attended the first session as the Muslim League had decided to boycott the Assembly. Rajendra Prasad was elected as the president of the Assembly. Nehru moved the famous Objectives Resolution which became the guiding principle for the entire exercise of constitution

making. B.R. Ambedkar became the head of the drafting committee. With India becoming independent on 15 August 1947, the Constituent Assembly became a sovereign body and doubled up as the Legislative for the newly independent Indian State. It was now responsible for framing the constitution as well as for making ordinary routine laws.

One of the earliest decisions taken by the leaders of the Assembly was to resolve not to take any decision through the majority vote. The Assembly decided at its floor that the majority decision was not the most satisfactory way of making a constitution. Once a proposal was moved and there was a minority opinion opposed to it, it was then the responsibility of the majority view to appease and satisfy the minority opinion and thus arrive at a consensus. Nothing short of a consensual decision was to be entered into the constitution. Thus every effort was made to protect the constitution by the tyranny of the majority view. This decision not to go only by the majority view and keep trying till a consensus was reached, naturally implied that there would be delays in arriving at a decision. It was therefore inevitable that the entire exercise took nearly three years. A total of 7,635 amendments to various clauses were placed of which 2,473 were actually moved. Yet in the end, this procedure produced a constitution which was owned by the entire Assembly, and through the Assembly, the entire nation. Above all, what made the Indian constitution truly consensual was that the national movement, during its long life of over three decades, had popularised the ideas of parliamentary democracy, republicanism, civil liberties and

social and economic justice. As a result the Indian people had begun to look upon these values as their own and not as alien impositions. The Indian constitution was therefore rightly seen as a document of the people as a whole and not of a few at the top.

So how has the constitution fared as a blueprint for the transformation of Indian society and polity? There is no doubt that the pace of transformation has been slow. But the transformation has to be eventually brought out by the people. The constitution can only play an enabling role. Constitutions do not work on their own; they have to be worked. It is however undeniable that even though the much needed transformation has not occurred, the constitution has created enough space for the socially marginalised people to organise their struggles for a better life and a share in the social benefits.

One success of the Indian constitution has been its ability to chalk out a middle path between conflicting conditions. One such middle path is between being fixed and unchangeable on the one hand, and being very volatile on the other. The real challenge has been to ensure that the letter of the constitution should not become an obstacle to genuine social change and the constitution should be able to modify itself in the light of real societal change. At the same time, if it were to be too volatile and prone to change, it would not really be effective.

Finally, the real big challenge is to find a middle path between being too emancipatory and being completely rooted in the social structure. The real dilemma is this: in order to be transformative, the

blueprint has to be emancipatory. A truly emancipatory document would not be fully representative. If, on the other hand, it is rooted in the social structure, it would cease to be transformative.

And this perhaps is the biggest strength and achievement of the Indian constitution. It is sufficiently rooted in the Indian conditions and the people see the constitution as their own. Yet it does not represent the conservative side of the Indian social condition. It is sufficiently emancipatory to be able to carry out a transformation of the existing conditions with the help of the people. The Indian constitution in this respect is the finest gift of the national movement to its people. It is truly a constitution *of* the Indian people, *for* the Indian people, and *by* the Indian people.

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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 Neetiyan:** (This booklet was published late last year.) Price 25 rupees.

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Over 100,000 Farmers to March to India's Parliament on Nov. 29–30

Pavan Kulkarni

On November 29 and 30, more than hundred thousand farmers from across India will converge in the capital city of New Delhi. They will march to parliament, highlighting the agrarian crisis which has lasted in India for decades, and the role of the far-right Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government in intensifying this crisis.

Marching along with them in solidarity will be organisations of students, industrial workers, retired soldiers and the oppressed castes. The demand of all these sections is for a special session of parliament to discuss the agrarian crisis as well as the 2006 report of the National Commission on Farmers. The latter had recommended crop acquisition by the state at a minimum support price (MSP) which is 50% above the full cost of production and redistribution of ceiling-surplus land to the landless, among other measures to alleviate the farm distress.

One of the key demands of the protesters is the adoption of a bill by parliament to waive off farmers' debts which have led hundreds of thousands of them to commit suicide over the last two decades. Other demands include ensuring forest rights for indigenous communities, policies enhancing the country's food security, affordable education and health care.

The world's largest producer of wheat, rice, pulses, sugarcane, cotton and milk, and the second largest producer of fruits and vegetables, India is home to 40% of the undernourished children on

the planet. As on 2013, according to a World Bank's estimate, the percentage of children suffering from malnutrition in India was twice that of sub-Saharan Africa.

38% of Indian children under the age of five suffer from stunted growth or irreversible brain damage due to undernourishment, and more than half the women of reproductive age are affected by anemia. This agrarian crisis, marked by immiseration of the peasantry and a decline in the average nutritional intake of the country, has been unfolding for decades now.

A decades-old crisis

After India's entry into the WTO in the 1990s, following the liberalisation of the country's economy after accepting a loan from IMF, the protection afforded to Indian peasantry was dismantled. This threw open the borders for agricultural commodities produced in advanced industrial countries. While exports of agricultural commodities declined, imports, which were worth \$4.19 billion in 2004–05, rose to almost \$12.6 billion by 2014–15. By 2016, it had risen further to almost \$21 billion. This flooding of the domestic market with subsidised agricultural goods produced with heavy subsidies in western countries has caused a sharp decline in food grain prices domestically.

On the other hand, the cost of agricultural inputs has seen a sharp increase due to reduction of subsidies on fertilisers and other inputs. With

no price controls in place, multinational agri-businesses, which have monopolised the production of many crucial inputs, have ratcheted up the prices further. This has resulted in a situation where the price a farmer receives for his produce is often lower even than the cost of production.

This lack of profitability in cultivation has forced a large portion of peasantry to borrow money to meet the expenses of cultivation. Between 1991 and 2013, the percentage of farming households in debt rose from 25.9% to 35%. Debt–asset ratio, which is a measure of the extent to which indebtedness is draining the value of one's assets, almost doubled in this period.

While bank loans for the agricultural sector were prioritised before liberalisation, starting from 1991, the credit allocation, in line with the neoliberal diktat, was increasingly made along the lines of profitability rather than for the purpose of meeting the most basic of national needs.

While 64% of the debt of rural households were owed to banks and cooperatives in 1992, by 2013, it had declined to 56% as the government reduced the credit available to the cultivators. As more and more farmers, desperate for capital, turned to informal sources, the share of debt owed to moneylenders, who charge usurious rates of interest, almost doubled.

This debt owed to moneylenders is widely recognised to be the most important reason driving farmers to commit suicide. Between 1995

and 2015, over 300,000 farmers have killed themselves, according to data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). Suicides committed by women and lower caste farmers are largely excluded from this figure, because they are not often counted as farmers in official statistics due to not possessing the title for the land they own and cultivate.

Promises betrayed

It was in this context that during the 2014 election campaign, the current prime minister, Narendra Modi, who was the BJP's prime ministerial candidate, presented himself as the savior of farmers. Attacking the previous government headed by the Indian National Congress party, he promised to address this agrarian crisis. Appearing before masses of peasants—sometimes in person and sometimes as a 3D hologram—Modi promised that if elected, his party would provide farmers with remunerative prices of 50% over the cost of production, as calculated in the 2006 report.

The party's election manifesto "was literally a wishlist of the farming community. Except for land reforms, almost every other demand [of the poor peasants] was featured in it. Cheaper credit, cheaper inputs, remunerative prices, insurance for crop loss, [the promise that] no land would be acquired without the consent of the farmers, water for each farm" were all assured during the election campaign, said Vijoo Krishnan, the joint secretary of All India Farmers Federation (AIKS), at a public meeting recently.

Krishnan recalled how they met the agriculture minister of the newly formed Modi government a few days after the election, and

demanded an MSP of over 50%. However, they were told, "These are just election promises; they cannot be implemented." The national president of the currently ruling BJP party has dismissed the promise as "election tricks".

A year after this government was formed, when the Consortium of Indian Farmers' Association filed a Public Interest Litigation to hold the government accountable, the government told the Supreme Court that it was not possible to provide the promised MSP, because doing so would distort the market.

Earlier this year, the government claimed that it had provided the MSP of 50% over the cost of production as promised by it. However, by using a different formula to calculate the production cost from the one in the commission's report, the government underestimated the cost of production by 40%. The real price that the farmers are actually getting are even less than this MSP the government claims to have provided.

Having promised that no land acquisition would be undertaken without farmers' consent, Krishnan said, the government, "within six months of coming to power.. came up with the land acquisition ordinance which literally mentioned that there is no need for any consent of farmers when [their] land is being acquired for different projects. . . . The entire livelihood of the farmers and agricultural workers depends on land, and this government was telling you need not ask [them] for their consent." Agricultural land of an area "at least twice the size of Britain is potentially under the threat of acquisition," he warned.

While crop insurance was promised, the scheme that was offered – under the name of 'Prime Minister's Insurance Scheme'—

turned out to be, as the renowned rural journalist P. Sainath put it, a massive scam. As on last year, a handful of insurance companies which had monopolised the sector, were reaping profits of over \$100 million a month amongst themselves, while the number of insured actually declined. In one district, farmers whose soybean crops were destroyed were paid between half a dollar and seven dollars as 'compensation.'

Farmers' suicides, which the BJP had promised to put an end to if elected, rose by 40% in the first two years of its government. In 2015, when the issue was becoming more and more politically sensitive, the NCRB stopped publishing data on farmers' suicide.

As many as 12 States and six union territories declared the number of farmer suicides that year as "zero". State governments selectively leak figures about suicides to the media using data from the revenue department. Being responsible for handing out compensations to the families of farmers who commit suicide, the revenue department has high stakes in understating the real number of farmer suicides.

While this has been the plight of the approximately 119 million cultivators in the country, the situation of the approximately 144 million landless agricultural laborers is no less dire. So low are the wages they earn that, according to one analysis based on data collected from 17 villages, "a family of five (a male worker, a female worker and three dependents) would require more than 600 days of employment [in a year] at currently prevailing wages in order to obtain earnings equivalent [to] the [World Bank's] dollar-a-day poverty line," states a fact sheet released by the organisers of the upcoming march.

This situation has brought together the farmers and agricultural laborers in a common struggle—two groups who have often been at odds with each other.

The distress in the agricultural sector as a whole, which today employs almost 55% of India's workforce, has been forcing cultivators to give up farming. Between 2001 and 2011, 9 million farmers have quit agriculture.

Mass migration

A majority of them have been migrating to small towns and cities in search of jobs. In a country which is also suffering from an acute unemployment crisis, there are not enough jobs to accommodate them. Not being able to find formal employment, most end up living in crowded slums in cities, working as casual laborers who are heavily exploited by a network of contractors.

The low wages they end up receiving for working for long hours in the absence of labor rights is further driving down the already abysmal average wage rate of two dollars a day for casual laborers in India.

“Such upheaval as being currently witnessed in rural India cannot leave its cities untouched. As distress migration from rural India continues unabated, and intensifies, the pressure would be as much on urban India. The very model of our social, economic, and perhaps political organisation, is under threat,” states a document released by the organisers of the march, arguing that the agrarian crisis is the nation's crisis. It is, the document concludes, “myopic for anyone to feel insulated from the rural tragedy that is unfolding right now.”

Court Orders Dutch Government to Cut Greenhouse Gases

Ben Cowles

On October 9, cheers erupted in a Dutch appeals court as it upheld a 2015 ruling ordering the government to cut the country's greenhouse gas emissions by at least 25 per cent by 2020.

Hague Appeals Court Presiding Judge Marie-Anne Tan-de Sonnaville rejected the government's appeal, reaffirming the country's legal obligations to protect citizens against dangerous climate change. “Considering the great dangers that are likely to occur, more ambitious measures have to be taken in the short term to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to protect the life and family life of citizens in the Netherlands,” the court said.

The original 2015 ruling was as a result of a case brought by the environmental campaigning organisation Urgenda on behalf of 900 Dutch citizens. The court's decision was the first time a judge legally required a state to take action on climate change.

Speaking in a video posted on Twitter after the ruling, Urgenda director Marjan Minnesma hailed the victory and hoped it would inspire others around the world. “I am extremely happy with the outcome of this ruling,” Minnesma said. “They said that all industrial countries should reduce emission at least by 25 per cent by 2020 and the faster the better.

“Based on human rights, they said that not acting is not allowed any more and we should act as fast as possible.

“We won on every practical point and I think this is a good thing for everybody in the world who would also like to start a court case.”

In its appeal, the Netherlands' conservative government argued the ruling meant the court was formulating government policy.

However the court rejected this notion, saying that judges must uphold international treaties such as the European human rights convention to which the Netherlands is party.

In a statement following the decision, the government said it would study the ruling “with an eye on possible further appeal,” but at the same time pledged to carry out the court's order.

The ruling comes a day after the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change urged governments to cut carbon emissions to zero by 2050 and a summer in which forests all across the Northern Hemisphere, including in the Arctic circle, were up in flames. Many of these are still burning.

Spectre of Fascism

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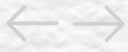
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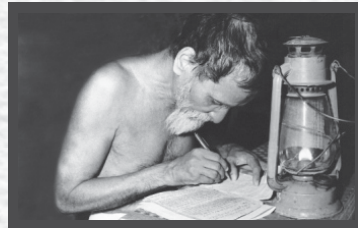
Acharya Vinoba - a spiritual leader was also an academic scholar and had studied all religions in depth. He was a philosopher, well-known author, educationist and sociologist. He had initiated and lead the Bhoodan and Gramdan movement. Paramdham Prakashan (ग्रामसेवा मंडळ) Pavanar with the help of Maharashtra Knowledge Corporation Limited has developed www.vinoba.in website in which the entire literature of Acharya Vinoba is hosted.

**An eloquent insight into the thoughts of
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Climate-Heating Greenhouse Gases at Record Levels, Says UN

Damian Carrington

The main greenhouse gas emissions driving climate change have all reached record levels, the UN's meteorology experts have reported.

Carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide are now far above pre-industrial levels, with no sign of a reversal of the upward trend, a World Meteorological Organization report says.

"The last time the Earth experienced a comparable concentration of CO₂ was 3–5m years ago, when the temperature was 2–3°C warmer and sea level was 10–20 metres higher than now," said the WMO secretary general, Petteri Taalas.

"The science is clear. Without rapid cuts in CO₂ and other greenhouse gases, climate change will have increasingly destructive and irreversible impacts on life on Earth. The window of opportunity for action is almost closed."

Levels of CO₂ rose to a global average of 405.5 parts per million in the atmosphere in 2017—almost 50% higher than before the industrial revolution.

Levels of methane, a potent greenhouse gas responsible for about 17% of global warming are now 2.5 times higher than pre-industrial times owing to emissions from cattle, rice paddies and leaks from oil and gas wells.

Nitrous oxide, which also warms the planet and destroys the Earth's protective ozone layer, is now over 20% higher than pre-industrial

levels. About 40% of N₂O comes from human activities including soil degradation, fertiliser use and industry.

The WMO also highlighted the discovery of illicit production of CFC-11, a banned chemical that also both warms the planet and destroys ozone. Investigations indicate that at least some of the production is in China.

In October the world's scientists said global warming of even 1.5°C would have severe consequences for humanity. International climate agreements had for two decades set 2°C as a limit.

"Every fraction of a degree of global warming matters, and so does every part per million of greenhouse gases," said the WMO deputy secretary general, Elena Manaenkova. "CO₂ remains in the atmosphere for hundreds of years and in the oceans for even longer. There is currently no magic wand to remove all the excess CO₂ from the atmosphere."

Prof Corinne Le Quéré, of the University of East Anglia, said she was not surprised by the new record levels of greenhouse gases. "But I am very concerned that all three gases most responsible for climate change are rising upwards unabated. It seems the urgency and extent of the actions needed to address climate change have not sunk in. Low-carbon technologies like wind, solar, and electric transport need to become mainstream, with old-fashioned polluting fossils pushed out rapidly."

Efforts to cut emissions are increasing and on Wednesday the UN's climate change body published a report on the commitments made in 2018. It found 9,000 cities in 128 countries were taking action, along with 240 states and regions in 40 countries and more than 6,000 businesses in 120 countries.

Patricia Espinosa, head of the UN framework convention on climate change, said: "On one hand, greenhouse gas emissions have yet to peak and countries struggle to maintain the concentrated attention and effort needed for a successful response to climate change. On the other hand, climate action is occurring, it is increasing and there is a will to do more. I highlight this because falling into despair and hopelessness is a danger equal to complacency, none of which we can afford."

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Fact Check: Spin-Master Jaitley's Claims on Demonetisation

Subodh Varma

Flying in the face of his own Prime Minister's statements, the Reserve Bank of India's notifications and all manner of evidence, Finance Minister Jaitley has made the astounding claim that the demonetisation of November 8, 2016 was not about confiscation of cash but was the means to achieve 'formalisation' of the economy.

The RBI notification of November 8, 2016 said that the measure was "necessitated to tackle counterfeiting Indian banknotes, to effectively nullify black money hoarded in cash and curb funding of terrorism with fake notes." Incidentally, the government notification (#2652) of that date is no longer available on the Finance Ministry website. PM Narendra Modi's famous speech to the country is still available though in which he holds forth on how this will unearth black money, curb corruption and nip terrorists in the bud.

Yet Jaitley is weaving a new fiction without batting an eyelid.

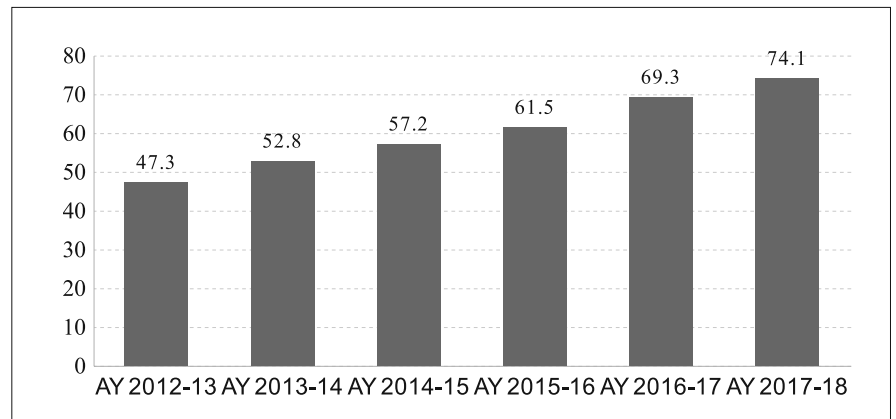
The Finance Minister says that demonetisation has led to formalisation of the economy. As an example, he says that the number of taxpayers has increased from "3.8 crore in May 2014 to 6.86 crore in four years of the BJP-led government". This is not a lie but a rather foolish attempt to deceive. The number of taxpayers has been increasing in any case, as shown in graph below, drawn from data put out by Central Board of Direct Taxes. It was increasing at the same

rate before the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government came to power. Demonetisation has done nothing to increase the numbers. Incidentally, the numbers quoted by Jaitley are inflated at the very origin because they include everybody who files a return. This includes over two crore people who had no taxable income though they filed the returns. This is a phenomenon that happens every year.

announcement. The only people who benefited were digital payment companies, who remain thankful to Modi for this bonanza, even if it lasted for a few months.

So, what about black money? Jaitley has conveniently forgotten about the claim repeated ad nauseum by Modi and all BJP leaders that demonetisation would lead to unearthing of thousands of crores of black money. That's because,

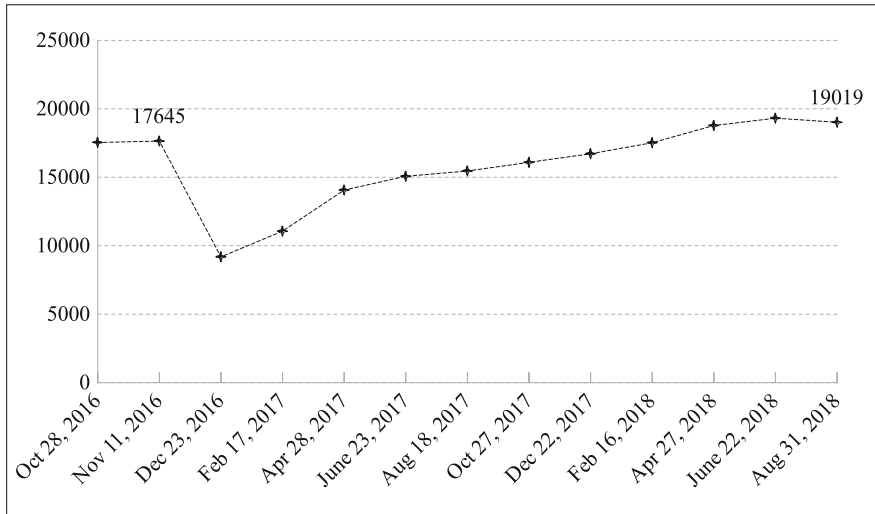
Table 1: Number of Taxpayers (in million)



Now look at another claim often made about demonetisation: that it pushed the economy towards more digital transactions. As shown in the graph below, currency in circulation was Rs 17.5 lakh crore on October 28, 2016 according to RBI data, barely a week before the disastrous demonetisation. It was wiped out in the notebandi days and has slowly but relentlessly climbed back and stood at Rs 19.02 lakh crore on Aug 31, 2018. Cash remains the dominant mode of transactions, although under coercion, it had crashed during the immediate weeks after Modi's

after taking two years to count the returned Rs 1,000 and Rs 500 withdrawn notes, the RBI had to admit finally that 99% of these had been returned to the bank. Far from unearthing black money, several thousand crores worth of black money got converted to white in the process, through diverse means, including proxy deposits.

Only a minuscule amount of fake currency was unearthed in the process. In fact, weeks after the new Rs 2,000 notes were issued, militants in Jammu & Kashmir were found in possession of fake versions.

Chart: Notes in Circulation (Rs, billion)

Jaitley is unwilling—or perhaps unable—to admit that the demonetisation move was one of the biggest economic disasters India has ever experienced. It made a laughing stock of the Modi government across the world, heaped untold economic ruin and distress on a majority of Indians, and has left the country fumbling and floundering ever since.

One foolish action, and the government has had to continue telling lies for two years. Such is the nature of this government of which Arun Jaitley is a leading spin-master.

Statement Condemning Attack on Classical Musical Expression

A number of prominent artists and performers, former judges and bureaucrats, academicians, social activists, public intellectuals, journalists and other concerned citizens from various walks of life, have released a statement condemning the attacks on south Indian musicians for performing interfaith music at classical music concerts.

The full statement (published in The Citizen on September 20, 2018):

In a recent occurrence in South India, eminent classical musicians have been intimidated, their concert engagements cancelled, due to pressure from intolerant forces that claim to speak on behalf of Hindus; thereby seeking to dictate the content and nature of cultural performances and music. We, the undersigned, register our strong protest and condemn this continual harassment, intimidation and the use of other undemocratic methods to silence voices. These are expressions of creativity, unity, humanity which are helping shape the building of a modern syncretic tradition in Indian classical music.

In the climate of social policing and restrictions on writers, thinkers and artists, the recent attacks on Carnatic musicians of repute, has again raised the sceptre of fear. This reflects the failure of the rule of law and constitutional guarantees. It is alarming that neither independent institutions such as the courts nor the governments whose duty it is to protect democratic space and freedom of expression, have stepped in to take decisive steps to end this menace.

It therefore falls upon artists, civil society groups and citizens to come forward and protect the democratic and constitutional right to creative expression. We cannot allow the intimidation and threat of violence by a (small) group which arrogates to itself, the role of being the keeper of culture, tradition and heritage. This has largely gone unchallenged by the rest of civil society, except by some musicians themselves.

Music is an expression of the universal truth of harmony of existence and connects people through its appreciation. It has the

capacity to be understood and bring together people across boundaries. It underscores the cross-cutting links amongst religions, blending the plurality into the oneness of sound and its appeal to all human beings and has reinforced beliefs in plurality and tolerance. While the content and the lyrics bring in the varied perceptions and understanding of people and communities, music establishes the universality of a multi-cultural society.

Carnatic music is a system of classical music which over the centuries has absorbed the cultural milieu of contemporary times and while the compositions were composed in the classical style, they celebrated differing perceptions of divinity. While the majority religion and its composers have predominantly occupied musical space, there have been composers whose lyrics have been in praise of different religious denominations. That is how it should be.

Many musicians have received threats by right wing Hindu organisations, for bringing people and religions together on a musical

platform. Some of them have been bullied into making apologies and cancelling concerts. O. S. Arun was invited by T. Samuel Joseph a long time student and teacher of Carnatic music to render Carnatic compositions on Christ. He was attacked online and pressure was put on him to cancel.

He cancelled citing personal reasons. Within days, WhatsApp and social media clippings of Nithyasree Mahadevan rendering a Christian song began circulating with comments to establish disapproval. The SSVT Temple in Washington DC which had invited T.M. Krishna to sing, cancelled the invitation at the behest of self-appointed Hindu gatekeepers.

T. M. Krishna in a statement said: "Considering the vile comments and threats issued by many on social media regarding Carnatic compositions on Jesus, I announce here that I will be releasing one Carnatic song every month on Jesus or Allah".

We want to express our support and appreciation for the very positive efforts of these musicians and register our protest against stigmatising them. We reassert the universal truth that music is not and cannot be denominational, and an exclusive domain of any one religion. All music is open to participation to people of all communities, and musical heritage belongs to humanity. We condemn the nascent attempts to limit and stifle free expression and invite you to join in voicing your protest.

Sd/- by hundreds of intellectuals from all over the country.

The right wing trolls have continued their offensive, and it nearly led to the cancellation of T.M. Krishna's program in Delhi. However, the Delhi Government

stepped in and hosted his program. Here is a small article on this program, which received an overwhelming response from Delhiites, with more than a thousand

people gathering at the Garden of Five Senses to listen to the genius from South sing. Below is a small piece on his mesmerising program in Delhi.

Rhythm of Resistance: When T.M. Krishna Did Sing

Daniya Rahman

On November 17, when people gathered at the Garden of Five Senses in Saket, it was not just for their love of music, but also in solidarity with a particular kind of politics. The evening was special and the performance important because T.M. Krishna was performing in Delhi three days after the Airports Authority of India (AAI) "postponed" an event featuring the Carnatic singer, owing to a backlash from right-wing trolls who called Krishna an "anti-national" "Urban Naxal".

The threats could not budge T.M. Krishna who made a public announcement asking for a stage, anywhere in Delhi on November 17, for him to come and sing. Responding to his appeal, Manish Sisodia, Deputy Chief Minister of Delhi, stepped in and invited Krishna to perform. "No artist should ever be denied an opportunity to perform. I have invited T.M. Krishna to perform on November 17 for the people of Delhi. It's important to maintain the dignity of the art and artists", Sisodia said.

Politics and art, thus shared the same stage at the Delhi government's event, "Awam ki Awaz". Krishna said before commencing his performance, "The spirit of the day has transformed over the few days and keeping with the spirit, I will try and see if we can see multiple voices,

languages, traditions, religion in the concert. I will not speak much." And while Krishna refused to talk about politics, his music spoke for him.

He struck a mesmerising chord against the on-going cultural barbarism that the country is subjected to. Starting with an all-denominational prayer that Mahatma Gandhi had instituted at the Sabarmati Ashram, Krishna's performance included a Malayalam rendition in praise of Jesus Christ, an adaptation of Nagoor Hanifa's Islamic Tamil song, Kabir, Tukaram, Basava, Perumal Murugan and much more.

Around the same time when AAI decided to postpone Krishna's performance, the organisers of another event hosting T.M. Krishna also received threat calls. Krishna is scheduled to hold a concert and music workshop on "Rare Krithis of Sri Muthuswamy Dikshithar" on 22-23 November at Gana Bharathi in Mysuru's Kuvempunagar area. The organisers, however, went ahead with the event. "There is no need to bow down to the pressure by some random elements", Himanshu C.R., one of the organisers said.

In the times when expressing a dissenting opinion mean threats, vandalising venues and cancellation of events, Krishna's performance was loud enough to reverberate a rhythm of resistance.

Letter to Editor

Atrocities Upon Minorities in China

Chandrabhaal Tripathi

I recently read the story of torture and exploitation of followers of Falun Gong in China, 'The SOS in my Halloween decorations', by Jon Kelly. When I visited the US for the first time in 1997 I came across information in this regard by the local Chinese people. Initially, I thought that it might be American propaganda, but later I came across cases of atrocities by the Chinese authorities upon Tibetans and Uighurs and I had to change my opinion. I also recalled the parallel in the erstwhile Soviet Union. We in our youth read stories and novels about the atrocities in the Stalinist era but our Indian communist friends would merely laugh these away as American propaganda. A great scholar like Mahapandit Rahul Sankrityayan who taught at Leningrad University and was not allowed to bring his Russian wife Lola with him to India in 1947 had been brainwashed like the other Indian communists. (Rahul ji resigned from the CPI over the issue of Hindi and not over any political ideological differences). While doing anthropological field work in Jaunsar-Bawar in Dehra Dun District in 1955-56, I read a book by a Russian writer, who had fled from Russia, that described the atrocities committed on dissenters by the Stalinist regime. The locale of that book was Leningrad. Therefore, I wrote a letter to Rahul ji who was living in Happy Valley, Mussoorie, at that time, requesting him to comment on the book as he happened to live in

that area which was the locale of the story of that book. I was dismayed by the response of the great scholar who wrote to me in Hindi on a post card: "It is nothing but propaganda by the decadent capitalist system. You will find similar propaganda books and literature circulated by the American agents. Please read them and you will realise how well oiled this anti-Soviet machinery is." No direct reply to the specific facts mentioned in the book. I was disappointed as I had great personal regard for Rahul ji as a Buddhist scholar, supporter of Hindi and leader of the peasant movement. Some time earlier the celebrated book *The God that Failed* had appeared and the episode of the escape of Stalin's daughter Svetlana from Russia and her being helped by Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia in her asylum and migration to the US had already created waves in intellectual circles in the free world. At the CPSU Congress in 1956, Khrushchev's speech fell like a bomb shell. But the Indian communists financed and controlled by the CPSU were so much brainwashed that an old friend and classmate of mine did not believe that Chernobyl had happened, and he called this catastrophe as American propaganda. Not that I am a supporter of the US. On the other hand, I was a victim of McCarthyism in 1958 when I was selected as the only Fulbright scholar from India from the discipline of Anthropology but was denied the US visa as I was considered to be a communist. I decided never to visit the US but

after 40 years I visited that country in 1997. Anyway, coming back to our main story, the last nail in the coffin of the Soviet Union was hammered by Boris Yeltsin and Mikhail Gorbachev during 1985-91 through their policies of 'perestroika' and 'glasnost.'

It is no wonder that in Communist China, which has acquired all the vices of the decadent capitalist culture, democracy and free speech are victims.

Footprints of A Crusader (The Life Story of Mrunal Gore)

by
Rohini Gawankar

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Uniqueness of the Indian Constitution

Salil Misra

What is the importance of the Indian Constitution? It is true that all constitutions are products of their own histories and the specific circumstances of the societies in which they were germinated. If so, then isn't each constitution equally unique and specific in its own way? Why should then the Indian Constitution be privileged with compliments such as unique and special?

The journey to the making of the Indian Constitution was neither smooth nor uniform. It was complex, varied, multi-stranded and contested. A large number of ideas, positions and ideals competed with one another to find a significant place in the holy-legal-foundational-axial book containing the collective aspirations of the people of independent India. The Indian Constitution, as it emerged from the three-year long proceedings of the Constituent Assembly, was much more than simply a book of legal code or a treatise on Indian politics or a governing manual for Indian state. It was also a blue-print for the transformation of a large Indian society—almost one-sixth of the world population, with strong continuities from distant past—in a modern direction. One important

quality of this blueprint was that it was not created by one or two exceptional minds, but a fairly large number of political leaders chosen indirectly by the people.

The Indian Constitution was a product of many encounters among a large number of ideas and ideals that sometimes clashed with, and sometimes complemented, each other. All of them fed into the Constitution in some way or the other. It was thus founded on multiple ideational sources. For instance there was the traditional Indian idea of maximum autonomy with least control, which was tremendously enriched by the modern liberal idea of freedom and choice in political and entrepreneurial life with limited governance. The synergy of the two played an important role in curbing the tendency towards absolutisation of state power at the time of constitution making.

Not all the ideas complemented each other. Some actually clashed. There was a British colonial idea—developed during the period of the British rule—of gradually preparing the Indian society for constitutional advance so as to prolong the British rule. The idea was to use the façade of constitutionalism which would enable the alien British rule to

establish a firm footing on Indian soil. According to this idea, an illusion of constitutional advance was to be maintained in order to create legitimacy for British rule in India. In the light of this imperative, the British implemented a series of constitutional measures since 1858. Each measure introduced some change and was an advance over the previous measure. Each was intended to delay or defer the ultimate change from an alien British rule to a representative rule of the Indian people.

This British idea of introducing change in order to prevent larger change came into clash with the Indian idea—developed since the late 19th century—of greater Indianisation and democratisation of the political structure. The Indian leaders critiqued the British initiatives and took their critique to a new height in the 1920s when they prepared an alternative constitution for India, popularly known as Nehru Report, named after Motilal Nehru, one of the main architects of the Report. Nehru Report was the first serious attempt by Indians to prepare a constitution for India and it differed from the British initiatives in some crucial respects.

The British had attempted to modernise Indian politics by legitimising and perpetuating differences—particularly along religious lines—in the Indian society. They created democratic openings but also created separate political domains for Hindus and Muslims. In a way they created separate and competitive democracies for Hindus and Muslims. They did so by dividing elected candidates, constituencies and even voters along religious lines. In the British version of democracy, Hindus and Muslims were politically

completely segregated from each other and were constituted into separate political domains. The Indian leaders offered a more imaginative system of weightage, safeguards and reservations as against complete political separation between groups and communities. This alternative idea was codified in the Nehru report.

There was thus an interesting encounter between the British idea and the Indian alternative on reservation versus separate electorate and which of the two was a superior idea. However, the British–Indian debate was conducted over religious communities. It took an interesting turn in the 1930s and manifested itself on the question of caste. This debate was conducted mainly between Gandhi and Ambedkar, two of the greatest leaders of the 20th century. The debate was on how to distribute political power under democracy among groups and communities but in such a manner so as not to accentuating political divisions among them. This indeed was an important question. Indian traditional plurality was of an unequal kind. A small numerical minority of upper caste Hindus had traditionally dominated over a majority of the lower castes and excluded them from social benefits and entitlements. They were able to do it by invoking the sacred authority of religious doctrines. This social domination by the minority over the majority on the basis of divine sanctions was possible at a time and in a society that had not experienced either democracy or secularism. It was also hoped that under modern conditions—engendered by democracy and secularism—such domination and exclusion would be unsustainable.

But a delay in the introduction of these two great ideals created doubts in the minds of Indian leaders on how to eliminate social hierarchy yet maintain unity and diversity. This really was the essence of the debate between Gandhi and Ambedkar.

Gandhi believed that it could be done by opting for a democracy in which political representatives would be responsible and accountable to all irrespective of caste. The burden of responsibility would moderate and dilute the impulse to dominate and exclude. Ambedkar on the other hand felt that a system of separate representation—only Dalits representing the Dalits—would create better conditions for justice and would eventually lead to social and political equality.

These two ideas—of separate political representation and accountability and a system of joint accountability—were *prima facie* opposed to each other. But each had its merit and both the ideas eventually found their way into the Constitution, albeit in a modified form.

Perhaps the most important idea in the constitutional journey developed in the 1930s. This was the idea of a constitution to be made, not by the tiny minority of the best minds alone, but by a Constituent Assembly chosen by the people. Jawaharlal Nehru was the main proponent of the idea. He married the constitutional idea with the democratic idea and argued that nothing short of a Constituent Assembly would satisfy the nationalist aspirations for a constitution. The British eventually conceded the demand. It was in 1946 that a Constituent Assembly, elected indirectly though restricted franchise, was created which started deliberating on what kind of a

constitution was best suited for the Indian people and society. The members debated for over three years—from 9 December 1946 till 24 January 1950—over virtually every aspect of the collective political life of the people. The 12 volumes of the Constituent Assembly Debates spread over nearly 5,500 pages are an ample testimony of the kind of challenges that were confronted by the makers of Indian Constitution.

When the slightly over 200 members of the newly constituted Constituent Assembly sat down to deliberate, they knew the supreme importance of the task they had been entrusted with. People drawn from different cultures, regions and backgrounds had to create consensus among themselves and prepare a document that would serve as the guiding principle for the future. It was no easy task. The members had to set aside their personal and group interests, their rivalries, ideological predilections and strive towards general agreement through engaged reasoning.

A large number of contentious issues confronted the members. One of them was the conflict between the modern impulse for equal opportunity and the idea of positive discrimination for those who had been historically discriminated against. This dilemma was obviously most conspicuous on the question of caste and how to deal with it. It was recognised by all that caste as an institution had been a source of great injustice to the lower castes. This injustice had to be removed by working towards the removal of the institution of caste and also by providing safeguards to the victims of caste oppression. However, the dilemma was that the two goals could not be pursued

simultaneously. Ambedkar himself may have experienced this dilemma when, on the one hand, he argued forcefully for the “Annihilation of Caste”, but on the other hand, also proposed, during the deliberations in the Constituent Assembly, that caste be made the criterion for the practice of positive discrimination. On the face of it, the two appeared contradictory: you cannot wish to annihilate the caste while at the same time make it the basis for a whole range of institutional arrangements. Caste could be annihilated when it was removed not simply from the social structure but also from the minds and the consciousness of the people. But how could it be removed if it became the bedrock of the official policy in the distribution of jobs and other benefits?

This certainly was a huge dilemma. It was simply not possible to wish it away. However it was addressed by making a distinction between the short-term priorities and the long-term goals. It was certainly a priority to promote a policy of positive discrimination to compensate for historical wrongs done to the lower castes. It was then hoped that the short-term measures would eventually feed into the long-term goal of the removal of caste from our social life. Whether the short-term measures will feed into the long-term goal, we do not know and it is too early to conclude either way. For the moment, it does seem that caste consciousness, instead of diminishing, has shown a revival in recent times with a degree of stridency. However the resolution of this question lies in the womb of time.

Yet another issue of debate was on the role of the State as the centralised decision making institution, and

the distribution of power between the central government and other federating units. On this issue the members were pulled in both the unitary and the federal directions. Pressures of national security, imperatives of national unity, and the recent anxieties created by the partition and the making of Pakistan, tilted the balance towards greater centralisation. On the other hand, the impulse of maintaining diversity and the fears of an authoritarian Centre justified the need for a federal framework with enough distribution of power. In the end, a consensus developed through a compromise which created a strong Centre (to maintain security and unity) but also balanced it by vesting enough power in the federating units (to preserve diversity and democracy).

One big question is: how could all this be possible? How was it that the representatives from a traditional, Brahmanical, upper-caste dominated, male-oriented society were able to rise above their inherited traditional baggage and create a blueprint which contained the possibility of a modern transformation? Some part of the answer has to be found in the very nature of the Indian nationalist movement which created a huge ideational churning during the initial decades of the 20th century. The national movement was not simply a struggle against the alien British imperialism. It was also a great project which mobilised the Indian people and harnessed their creative energies towards a modern direction. The national movement triggered many debates around the nature of the future, which were eventually taken up in a systematic manner by the members of the Constituent Assembly. In this

sense the Constituent Assembly represented more of a continuation and a culmination of the national movement, rather than a separate process altogether. It may be argued that the Indian people and their leaders had begun preparing their constitution much before the convening of the Constituent Assembly. The mammoth transformational experience of the national movement eventually culminated in a transformational document, the Constitution of India.

There is no doubt that the Indian Constitution has withstood the test of time and thus lived up to the expectations of the makers of the Constitution several decades ago. However, one should also remember the Constitution for some crucial omissions and missed opportunities. One such missed opportunity was the question of gender justice. Even though women were granted the equality of citizenship by the Constitution, this equality in a deeply unequal society could only serve to perpetuate inequality. It is truly unfortunate that the principle of positive discrimination, which was applied to the question of caste, was not extended to the question of gender. It turned out to be a naïve optimism to believe that merely the creation of equal opportunity would create conditions for gender equality. The great reluctance of our current political class to take up the issue of women's reservation in the Parliament is ample testimony that the Constitution makers placed a certain faith in their political successors, which turned out to be completely misplaced. It is undeniable that the Constitution makers made a huge mistake in leaving this question to be settled by the future generation of political

leaders. The failure to institute a proper mechanism to ensure gender justice must be ranked as one of the great failures on the part of the Constitution makers.

The failures and silences notwithstanding, it has to be recognised that the period 1946–50 is truly an axial period of our constitutional history. It was during this period that around 200 representatives of the Indian people got together to create history. By any reckoning they were normal unexceptional people—mostly middle-aged men, drawn from traditional backgrounds, and from the privileged upper strata of the society. Nonetheless, they knew that they had been entrusted with a great task. And, to paraphrase Nehru, the greatness of the task was so overwhelming that it cast its shadow

on them and, in the process, they also became great. They transcended their group interests, class location, inherited privileges and got involved in creating a blueprint for India's modern transformation. They gave themselves a project—how to transform a large traditional society with multiple diversities into a modern society, without endangering the diversity, but by removing its undesirable, hierarchical aspects. In other words, they took up the challenge of how to retain the positive elements of Indian traditions and yet create a transformational pull in a modern direction. There is no doubt that they were largely successful in preparing the roadmap. It is now for the people of India and their representatives to work towards translating that roadmap into reality.

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Maratha Agitation for Reservations : Part I

Neeraj Jain

On November 29, 2018, both the Maharashtra legislative assembly and council passed a bill granting 16% reservation to the Maratha community. The bill provides for reservation of seats for admission in educational institutions and posts in public services to the Marathas, who have been declared as socially and educationally backward class of citizens. The reservation can be availed by those below the “creamy layer” in the community, which has been defined as those with an annual income of Rs 8 lakh and more. Existing quotas for the OBCs and others will not be touched. This therefore takes the total percentage of quotas in the state from 52% to 68%. The tabling of the bill followed the submission of the report by

the Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission on social and economic conditions of the Maratha community. The Commission had recommended grant of quota to the community.

The Maratha community, which constitutes over 30 per cent of the state's population and is one of the dominant communities of the state, has been demanding reservation in government jobs and education for a long time. Likewise, 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 also raised similar demands. They are all demanding that they also be given reservations.

In Maharashtra, bowing to the

clout of the Maratha community, the previous Congress–NCP government in 2014 had passed an ordinance giving 16% quota to the Marathas. Likewise, Haryana has also attempted to placate the Jats and in 2016, gave them reservation which hiked the total quotas in the state to 67%; while in Rajasthan, the state government has sought to grant reservation to Gujjars which took the total quotas in the state to 54%. However, all these moves have been struck down by the courts, on the ground that the quota violated the decision of the Supreme Court that had in 1992 capped the total reservations in a state at 50%.

Reservations in the Constitution

Because of competitive populism and electoral calculations, no major political party in any state has opposed the demand of erstwhile dominant castes for reservation, 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; 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 demand of the Maratha / Jat / Patel / Gujjar youth for reservations, focus on Maharashtra, 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. These policies have pushed Indian 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.

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.

The Agricultural Crisis

While the contribution of agriculture to the country's GDP has come down by half over the period 1983–84 to 2010–11,⁶ 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.⁷ 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).

The net result of these anti-small farmer policies is that for nearly 70% of Indian farmers who have land holdings of less

Table 1: Average Growth Rates of Area, Production & Yield Under Foodgrains, Non-Foodgrains & All Crops⁸

	Foodgrains			Non-foodgrains			All crops		
	Area	Prod.	Yield	Area	Prod.	Yield	Area	Prod.	Yield
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

than 1 hectare, total income from all sources (cultivation, farming of animals, non-farm business and wages) has fallen to less than consumption expenditure.⁹ 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 36,972.¹⁰

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.¹¹ 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,¹² 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 (Table 2).

Three decades of battering by hostile policies and the worsening debt crisis have pushed the hardy Indian peasants into such despair

Table 2: BJP Government Allocation for Agriculture Related Sectors, 2014–18¹³ (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%

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.¹⁴

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 Years¹⁵
(in million)

	<i>Agricultural Employment</i>
1983	207.23
1993–94	242.46
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.¹⁶ 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% 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% of the total official workforce in the country of 460 million.¹⁷

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.¹⁹ 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 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

Table 4: Total Employment, Employment Growth Rate and GDP Growth Rate, 1983 to 2009–10¹⁸

	<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	1993–94 to 2009–10	1.30%	

2009–10, the total number of formal jobs in the economy actually fell from 35 million to 33 million (Table 5)!

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’²¹, constitute just 7.2% of the total work force.²² 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.²³

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 2017.²⁴

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,²⁵ 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,

Table 5: Formal and Informal Employment in India²⁰
(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

total public sector employment in the country is only around 4% of the total employment in the country.²⁶ 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 governments²⁷), 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.²⁸

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.

In the next issue of *Janata*, we will discuss some of the demands that need to be raised for meaningful job creation in the country.

Table 6: Total Government Employment (Centre+State+Local Govt.+Quasi Govt.) (in lakh)

Year	Total Employment
1981	154.8
1991	190.6
2012	176.1

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P. Viswambharan: A Real Gandhian Socialist

P.M. Dev

Ninth December 2018 is the second death anniversary of P. Viswambharan, prominent socialist leader, well-known to the readers of Janata. He was member of both Travancore–Kochi (1954) and Kerala Legislative Assemblies (1960) and the Parliament (1960). He was the state President of the Socialist Party (1971), Janata Party and Janata Dal (1980–1993), and has the distinction of having been the first convener of the Left Democratic Front (1973) in Kerala.

P. Viswambharan: Gandhian Socialist, a biography in Malayalam by senior journalist Ajith Venniyoor, published by Kerala Institute of Languages, not only provides a comprehensive view of P. Viswambharan's life and achievements, but also paints a brilliant picture of the evolution of socialist movement in India and particularly in Kerala.

Socialism is a word that has been used too often and too loosely to mean anything concrete. There have been and there still are parties and groups which carry that label. There have been also many advocates and votaries of socialism in our country. For many it is a fashionable habit to swear by the word socialism.

The idea of universal equality, most solemnly proclaimed by the French Revolution towards the end of the 18th century, is at the heart of the concept of socialism. There have been socialisms of sorts and socialists of different hues with no concern for this fundamental human orientation. They are not the

protagonists of genuine socialism, but its detractors and enemies. It is often difficult to distinguish the genuine from the spurious. Socialism, as the yearning of the human spirit for universal sharing, is a potent and challenging dream. Living this dream, realising it in the concrete situations of one's life, is one of the basic challenges of leading a rational human life.

Mahatma Gandhi was one who relentlessly followed the demands of this dream. Gandhi did not study socialism to become a socialist. Socialism was the very inner orientation of his being. Genuine socialism is based on truth and it can be realised only through peaceful means, Gandhi believed. Violence begets violence and is the negation of a socialist attitude.

From his early days P. Viswambharan was fired by the ideal of socialism. He derived inspiration from outstanding national leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jayapraksh Narayan, Acharya Narendra Dev, Dr Ram Manohar Lohia, Achyut Patwardhan, Yusuf Meher Ali, Ashok Mehta and M.R. Masani.

It was a humiliating experience of social discrimination he had in childhood that opened Viswambharan's eyes to the injustice involved in social segregation and inequality. His young sensitive mind started reflecting on the irrationality and inhumanity of the prevailing social system and ethos. His heart longed for change and he decided to dedicate his life to bring about

the change he envisioned. Gandhi was the brightest star in the socio-political firmament at that time. He wholeheartedly embraced the Gandhian socialist vision as his guiding philosophy of life.

Many people have taken to the socialist path. But few have stayed on it till the end. Opportunism had the upper hand over most votaries of socialism. The merit and greatness of P. Viswambharan is that he never swerved from the path he had chosen. Threats and temptations were galore in his political career that spanned more than six decades. But he stood firm in his resolve and commitment to the cause he espoused. He was a 'political sanyasi', who preferred to forgo everything for being faithful to his ideal than betray it, as did many of his contemporaries. Not desiring any personal gain, he found joy in giving unreservedly to others. There were trying times, when he felt neglected, belittled, misunderstood, wounded, betrayed, but he would rather bear with the suffering than forsake his ideal.

Was Viswambharan's life a success? Did he attain what he had sought? The answer would depend on one's definition of success and fulfillment. He succeeded to a large extent in strengthening the socialist movement, of which he was a part. But he failed in making it a decisive political force in the country, which he wanted it to be. Desire for personal gain as against passion for social change was what motivated most of the leaders. Viswambharan's heart bled seeing

the party he had built up with much toil and sweat split into meaningless factions. But he nursed no rancour or animosity towards any one. His success lies in the fact that he was able to hold aloft the flag of political transparency and decency even in the midst of failures and catastrophe. Viswambharan has left a rich legacy of high political morality. May be his life is more relevant to the future than to the immediate present. Viswambharan's life shines as a brilliant example of honesty, selflessness and commitment in the personal as well as political spheres of life.

Viswambharan always wanted to believe that socialism has future in India. It is that faith that sustained his life. He believed that sacrifices made today would not be in vain tomorrow. Optimistic futurism was a strong trait of his character.

Ajith Venniyoor's book *P. Viswambharan, Gandhian Socialist*, published in August 2017, after Viswambharan's demise in November 2016, has done a great service to the cause of socialism in our country by highlighting the themes of honesty and dedication in public life that characterised Viswambharan's checkered political life. Through the narration of relevant anecdotes and linking them with the political history of the country, the author has painted an inspiring picture of a man, who till the end of his last breath, never compromised with the ideal of genuine socialism and made sincere efforts at promoting Gandhian socialism, which alone holds promise for our country, plagued by the evils of hatred, religious bigotry, obscurantism, fanaticism, factionalism, corruption and the like.

Tocitefromtheprefacebyeminent

journalist and author T.J.S. George: "Blessed was Viswambharan's life. The gentlemanliness that even his political rivals admired emphasised Viswambharan's uniqueness. He must have enjoyed the sense of self-fulfillment in having kept his conscience clean against the ambitions and temptations that characterized the political scenario in those days. In the final analysis is that not what gives joy to a man? Peace of mind. The comfort of self-control. The knowledge that one has not pained any one in life. The contentment of having done what lay in one's capacity for the good of fellow-human beings. In one word self-fulfillment. Viswambharan, above all, was a contented person.

"This book, which tells the story of that dedication and contentment is a timely good reminder. Over and above being the narration of Viswambharan's life, these pages direct our attention to the importance of goodness in our society. In this epoch, when cynicism is recognised as the distinguishing feature of parties and their leaders, why the idealists cling to their ideals is a topic worth pondering."

P. Viswambharan will always live in our hearts as a beacon of perennial humanistic values such as socialism, democracy, secularism, and nationalism. The biography has great relevance in the present socio-political context in our country.

US: History of Violent Theft of Land and Capital

Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz

The United States has been at war every day since its founding, often covertly and often in several parts of the world at once. As ghastly as that sentence is, it still does not capture the full picture. Indeed, prior to its founding, what would become the United States was engaged—as it would continue to be for more than a century following its founding—in internal warfare to piece together its continental territory. Even during the Civil War, both the Union and Confederate armies continued to war against the nations of the Diné and Apache, the Cheyenne and the Dakota, inflicting hideous massacres upon civilians and forcing their relocations. Yet when considering the history of US imperialism and militarism, few historians trace their genesis to this period of internal

empire-building. They should. The origin of the United States in settler colonialism—as an empire born from the violent acquisition of indigenous lands and the ruthless devaluation of indigenous lives—lends the country unique characteristics that matter when considering questions of how to unhitch its future from its violent DNA.

The United States is not exceptional in the amount of violence or bloodshed when compared to colonial conquests in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and South America. Elimination of the native is implicit in settler colonialism and colonial projects in which large swaths of land and workforces are sought for commercial exploitation. Extreme violence against noncombatants was a defining characteristic of all

European colonialism, often with genocidal results.

The privatisation of land is at the core of the US experiment, and its military powerhouse was born to expropriate resources. Apt, then, that we once again have a real estate man for president.

Rather, what distinguishes the United States is the triumphal mythology attached to that violence and its political uses, even to this day. The post-9/11 external and internal US war against Muslims-as-“barbarians” finds its prefiguration in the “savage wars” of the American colonies and the early US state against Native Americans. And when there were, in effect, no Native Americans left to fight, the practice of “savage wars” remained. In the twentieth century, well before the War on Terror, the United States carried out large-scale warfare in the Philippines, Europe, Korea and Vietnam; prolonged invasions and occupations in Cuba, Nicaragua, Haiti and the Dominican Republic; and counterinsurgencies in Columbia and Southern Africa. In all instances, the United States has perceived itself to be pitted in war against savage forces.

Appropriating the land from its stewards was racialised war from the first British settlement in Jamestown, pitting “civilisation” against “savagery.” Through this pursuit, the US military gained its unique character as a force with mastery in “irregular” warfare. In spite of this, most military historians pay little attention to the so-called Indian Wars from 1607 to 1890, as well as the 1846–48 invasion and occupation of Mexico. Yet it was during the nearly two centuries of British colonisation of North America that generations of settlers gained experience as “Indian

fighters” outside any organised military institution. While large, highly regimented “regular” armies fought over geopolitical goals in Europe, Anglo settlers in North America waged deadly irregular warfare against the continent’s indigenous nations to seize their land, resources and roads, driving them westward and eventually forcibly relocating them west of the Mississippi. Even following the founding of the professional US Army in the 1810s, irregular warfare was the method of the US conquest of the Ohio Valley, Great Lakes, Southeast and Mississippi Valley regions, then west of the Mississippi to the Pacific, including taking half of Mexico. Since that time, irregular methods have been used in tandem with operations of regular armed forces and are, perhaps, what most marks US armed forces as different from other armies of global powers.

By the presidency of Andrew Jackson (1829–37), whose lust for displacing and killing Native Americans was unparalleled, the character of the US armed forces had come, in the national imaginary, to be deeply entangled with the mystique of indigenous nations—as though, in adopting the practices of irregular warfare, US soldiers had become the very thing they were fighting. This persona involved a certain identification with the Native enemy, marking the settler as Native American rather than European. This was part of the sleight of hand by which US Americans came to genuinely believe that they had a rightful claim to the continent: they had fought for it and “become” its indigenous inhabitants.

Irregular military techniques that were perfected while expropriating Native American lands were then

applied to fighting the Mexican Republic. At the time of its independence from Spain in 1821, the territory of Mexico included what is now the states of California, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, Utah and Texas. Upon independence, Mexico continued the practice of allowing non-Mexicans to acquire large swaths of land for development under land grants, with the assumption that this would also mean the welcome eradication of indigenous peoples. By 1836 nearly 40,000 Americans, nearly all slavers (and not counting the enslaved), had moved to Mexican Texas. Their ranger militias were a part of the settlement, and in 1835 became formally institutionalised as the Texas Rangers. Their principal state-sponsored task was the eradication of the Comanche nation and all other Native peoples in Texas. Mounted and armed with the new killing machine, the five-shot Colt Paterson revolver, they did so with dedicated precision.

Having perfected their art in counterinsurgency operations against Comanches and other Native communities, the Texas Rangers went on to play a significant role in the US invasion of Mexico. As seasoned counterinsurgents, they guided US Army forces deep into Mexico, engaging in the Battle of Monterrey. Rangers also accompanied General Winfield Scott’s army and the Marines by sea, landing in Vera Cruz and mounting a siege of Mexico’s main commercial port city. They then marched on, leaving a path of civilian corpses and destruction, to occupy Mexico City, where the citizens called them Texas Devils. In defeat and under military occupation, Mexico ceded the northern half of its territory to

the United States, and Texas became a state in 1845. Soon after, in 1860, Texas seceded, contributing its Rangers to the Confederate cause. After the Civil War, the Texas Rangers picked up where they had left off, pursuing counterinsurgency against both remaining Native communities and resistant Mexicans.

The Marines also trace half of their mythological origins to the invasion of Mexico that nearly completed the continental United States. The opening lyric of the official hymn of the Marine Corps, composed and adopted in 1847, is “From the Halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli.” Tripoli refers to the First Barbary War of 1801–5, when the Marines were dispatched to North Africa by President Thomas Jefferson to invade the Berber Nation, shelling the city of Tripoli, taking captives, and blockading key Barbary ports for nearly four years. The “Hall of Montezuma,” though, refers to the invasion of Mexico: while the US Army occupied what is now California, Arizona and New Mexico, the Marines invaded by sea and marched to Mexico City, murdering and torturing civilian resisters along the way.

So what does it matter, for those of us who strive for peace and justice, that the US military had its start in killing indigenous populations, or that US imperialism has its roots in the expropriation of indigenous lands?

It matters because it tells us that the privatisation of lands and other forms of human capital are at the core of the US experiment. The militaristic–capitalist powerhouse of the United States derives from real estate (which includes African bodies, as well as appropriated land). It is apt that we once again

have a real estate man for president, much like the first president, George Washington, whose fortune came mainly from his success speculating on unceded Indian lands. The US governmental structure is designed to serve private property interests, the primary actors in establishing the United States being slavers and land speculators. That is, the United States was founded as a capitalist empire. This was exceptional in the world and has remained exceptional, though not in a way that benefits humanity. The military was designed to expropriate resources, guarding them against loss, and will continue to do so if left to its own devices under the control of rapacious capitalists.

When extreme white nationalists

make themselves visible—as they have for the past decade, and now more than ever with a vocal white nationalist president—they are dismissed as marginal, rather than being understood as the spiritual descendants of the settlers. White supremacists are not wrong when they claim that they understand something about the American Dream that the rest of us do not, though it is nothing to brag about. Indeed, the origins of the United States are consistent with white nationalist ideology. And this is where those of us who wish for peace and justice must start: with full awareness that we are trying to fundamentally change the nature of the country, which will always be extremely difficult work.

Major BDS Victories in 2018

Four decades ago, in 1977 the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) named November 29 as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Since then, every year on this day the UN, different countries, rights groups and activists express their solidarity with Palestine.

Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garces, the President of the 73rd Session of the UNGA wrote on Twitter, “Let us demonstrate our commitment to the Palestinian people by strengthening multilateralism and making the @UN work for all people—for human rights, peace and security and sustainable development.”

Thirty years prior to the declaration of November 29 as the international day for solidarity with Palestinians, in 1947, the UN adopted resolution 181 (II), which called for the establishment of an independent Israeli and Palestinian state as well

as a Special International Regime for Jerusalem.

The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres reaffirmed the 1947 resolution on November 28, 2018, saying that the leadership of Israel and Palestine should take “bold steps and restore faith in the promise of Resolution 181, of two states living side-by-side in peace and security, fulfilling the legitimate national aspirations of both peoples, with borders based on the 1967 lines and Jerusalem as the capital of both states - East Jerusalem being the capital of the Palestinian state.”

India and South Africa also showed their solidarity with Palestinian people.

While this symbolic message of solidarity with Palestinian people is seen every year, the reality and brutality of Israel’s occupation remain unchanged.

Diplomatic delcarations and

resolutions may not affect Israel's ongoing occupation, human rights violations, and outright colonisation of Palestinian land, as they represent no tangible cost for Israel.

However, far away from diplomatic centers, the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement has scored major victories that threaten Israel's normalization of the occupation of Palestine through economic pressure and increasing cultural and academic isolation.

The non-violent BDS movement, founded in 2005 by 170 Palestinian unions, political parties, refugee networks, and among others, women organizations has gained such renown that it was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Inspired in South Africa's anti-apartheid movement, BDS calls for non-violent pressure on Israel through boycotting organisations linked to Israel, withdrawing investment from Israeli companies, and sanctioning the county until Israel: 1) recognises the right of Palestinian refugees to return; 2) ends the military occupation of Palestine; and 3) ends the apartheid regime by recognising equal rights for Palestinians.

Here are five of the BDS Movement's main victories this year:

1. Meteor Festival Dropped by 15 Artists

After calls by BDS activists, 15 artists boycotted Israel's Meteor Festival in September. Among the most important artists to cancel their performance in Tel Aviv was Lana Del Rey from the United States and Of Montreal from Canada.

Del Rey was reluctant at first, arguing that her performance was not political.

Yousef Munayyer, responded: "When a civil society movement of oppressed people asks you not to play in the state that oppresses them and uses cultural performance to whitewash their image, rejecting their request *IS* a political statement and it is not one history will judge kindly."

After enough pressure she and 14 more artists refused to "whitewash" the Israel occupation.

2. Filmmakers Boycott Tel Aviv LGBT International Film Festival

In June, the BDS movement celebrated that 14 film directors from Brazil, France, Ireland, Spain, Pakistan, and more cancelled their participation in the Tel Aviv LGBT International Film Festival citing BDS.

"In total, fourteen filmmakers and other artists canceled their participation or declared their support for boycotting the festival because it is sponsored by the Israeli government, and is therefore clearly subject to the Palestinian call for cultural boycott until Israel ceases its systematic violations of Palestinian human rights. Filmmakers also expressed their opposition to the festival's "pinkwashing," or cynical use of LGBTQI rights to cover up and normalise Israel's regime of oppression against Palestinians," BDS stated.

3. Argentina Cancels Friendly Match with Israel

Under the hashtag #NothingFriendly BDS activists and footballers in Gaza who had sustained injuries due to Israeli use of live ammunition against Palestinian protesters taking part in the Great March of Return, urged the Argentine team to cancel a friendly

match with Israel.

After announcing the decision to cancel the match, Israel tried to spin the story as the result of frightened football players and violent Palestinians. However, days after the announcement the president of the Argentine Football Association Claudio Tapia said, "I hope everyone understands this decision I made as a contribution to world peace" and player Gonzalo Higuain said in an interview with ESPN, "I think at the end we were able to do the right thing."

In July Adidas stopped sponsoring the Israel Football Association (IFA). The decision came after over 130 Palestinian football clubs urged the company to end its sponsorship to IFA, which includes clubs based in settlements, "stolen land."

4. Ireland's Ban of Goods Produced in Illegal Israeli Settlements

BDS secured another victory when in July, Ireland became the first country to approve a ban on all trade with illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank.

The Irish senate approved the Occupied Territories Bill. The Irish government opposed the legislation, but 25 independent and opposition lawmakers secured its approval.

5. Academics Turn Their Backs to Apartheid

This May, students of the Department of Philosophy and Humanities of Chile's largest public university, Universidad de Chile, voted to endorse BDS.

As the Israeli army was shooting and killing Palestinian protesters in Gaza, and the United States inaugurated its new embassy in the occupied city of Jerusalem, students

in Chile voted to sever ties with the University of Tel Aviv and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

In the US, in September, a professor and a teaching assistant from the University of Michigan denied writing recommendation letters to two students whose destination of study was Israel. They cited BDS.

BDS supporters have faced growing criticism by Israeli officials and Zionist organizations that insist in accusing them of being anti-semitic. Pink Floyd's former member Roger Waters and BDS promoter has responded to this accusation arguing that defending the human rights of Palestinians cannot be called anti-

semitic.

BDS' most symbolic endorsement this year was by prominent Israeli theatre actor and director, Itay Tiran, who came out in defense of the BDS movement in September, calling it "a perfectly legitimate form of resistance."

Courtesy: Telesur

Our New International Movement Will Fight Rising Fascism and Globalists

Yanis Varoufakis

United States socialist politician Bernie Sanders and former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis have announced the formation of an international progressive movement to combat the rise of an "authoritarian axis" and "The Movement," a far-right nationalist front with an international reach. Below is a statement by Yanis Varoufakis on the reasons for the initiative.

Our era will be remembered for the triumphant march of a globally unifying rightwing—a Nationalist International—that sprang out of the cesspool of financialised capitalism. Whether it will also be remembered for a successful humanist challenge to this menace depends on the willingness of progressives in the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom as well as countries like Mexico, India and South Africa, to forge a coherent Progressive International.

Our task is not unprecedented. Fascists did not come to power in the mid-war period by promising violence, war or concentration camps. They came to power by addressing good people who, following a severe capitalist crisis,

had been treated for too long like livestock that had lost its market value. Instead of treating them like "deplorables", fascists looked at them in the eye and promised to restore their pride, offered their friendship, gave them a sense that they belonged to a larger ideal, allowed them to think of themselves as something more than sovereign consumers.

That injection of self-esteem was accompanied by warnings against the lurking "alien" who threatened their revived hope. The politics of "us versus them" took over, bleached of social class characteristics and defined solely in terms of identities. The fear of losing status turned into tolerance of human rights abuses first against the suspect "others" and then against any and all dissent. Soon, as the establishment's control over politics waned under the weight of the economic crisis it had caused, the progressives ended up marginalised or in prison. By then it was all over.

Is this not how Donald Trump first conquered the White House and is now winning the discursive war against a Democratic party establishment? Is this not reminiscent of the Conservative

Brexiters' sudden appreciation of a National Health Service they had starved of funds for decades, or the energetic embracing of democracy that Thatcherism had subordinated to the logic of market forces? Are these not the ways of the hard right governments in Austria, Hungary and Poland, of Greece's Golden Dawn Nazis and, most poignantly, of Matteo Salvini, the strongman steering the new Italian government? Everywhere we look today we see manifestations of the resurgence of an ambitious Nationalist International, the likes of which we have not seen since the 1930s. As for the establishment, they are behaving as if with a penchant to repeat the Weimar Republic's every mistake.

But enough of the diagnosis. The pertinent question now is: what must we do? A tactical alliance with the globalist establishment is out of the question. Tony Blair, Hilary Clinton, the social democratic establishment in continental Europe are too compromised by their monetary links to a degenerating financialised capitalism and its accompanying ideology. For decades they relied on free market populism: the false

promise that everyone can become better off as long as we submit to commodification. They'd like us to believe in a never-ending escalator that will take us to the heights of consumer satisfaction, but it doesn't exist.

Our generation's 1929, which occurred in 2008, shattered this illusion. The establishment continued as if it were possible to mend things via a combination of austerity for the many, socialism for the very few and authoritarianism all around. All the while, the Nationalist International has been riding to victory, fuelled by growing discontent. To counter this power, progressives must specify very precisely the causes and nature of the people's unrest and unhappiness: namely, the global oligarchy's intense class war against the burgeoning precariat, against what is left of the western proletariat and, generally, against weaker citizens.

Next, we need to demonstrate that the only way the many can regain control of our lives, our communities, our cities and our countries is by coordinating our struggles along the axis of an Internationalist New Deal. While globalised financial capital can no longer be allowed to tear our societies into shreds, we must explain that no country is an island. Just like climate change demands of us both local and international action, so too does the fight against poverty, private debt and rogue bankers. To illustrate that tariffs are not the best way of protecting our workers, since they mostly enrich local oligarchies, we must campaign for trade agreements that commit governments of poorer countries to legislating minimum living wages for their workers and guaranteed jobs locally. That way communities

can be revived in richer and poorer countries at once.

Even more ambitiously, our Progressive International must propose an International Monetary Clearing Union, of the type John Maynard Keynes suggested during the Bretton Woods conference in 1944, including well-designed restrictions on capital movements. By rebalancing wages, trade and finance at a global scale, both involuntary migration and involuntary unemployment will recede, thus ending the moral panic over the human right to move freely about the world.

And who is going to piece together this desperately needed Progressive International? Happily, there is no shortage of potential initiators: Bernie Sanders's "political revolution" in the US, Jeremy Corbyn's Labour party, our Democracy in Europe Movement (DiEM25), Mexico's president-elect, the progressive elements of the African National Congress, the various movements fighting against bigotry and austerity in India.

Let us begin today. More will follow us the moment when hatred and anger yield to rational hope.

Yanis Varoufakis is the former Greek finance minister and co-founder of DiEM25 whose New Deal for Europe will be put to European voters in the May 2019 European Parliament elections

Bernie Sanders' comments on Yanis Varoufakis' piece:

Yanis Varoufakis is exactly right. At a time of massive global wealth and income inequality, oligarchy, rising authoritarianism and militarism, we need a Progressive International movement to counter these threats. It is not acceptable that the top 1% of the world's

population owns more wealth than the bottom 99%, that multinational corporations and the wealthy stash over \$21 trillion in offshore bank accounts to avoid paying their fair share of taxes, and that the fossil fuel industry continues to destroy the planet because countries are unable to cooperate effectively to combat climate change.

While the very rich get much richer, people all over the globe are working longer hours for stagnating wages, and fear for their children's future. Authoritarians exploit these economic anxieties, creating scapegoats which pit one group against another.

The solution, as Varoufakis points out, is an international progressive agenda that brings working people together around a vision of shared prosperity, security and dignity for all people. The fate of the world is at stake. Let us go forward together now!

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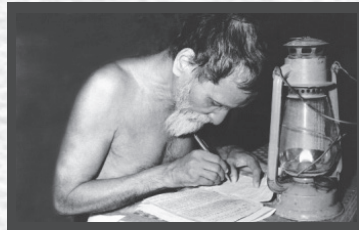
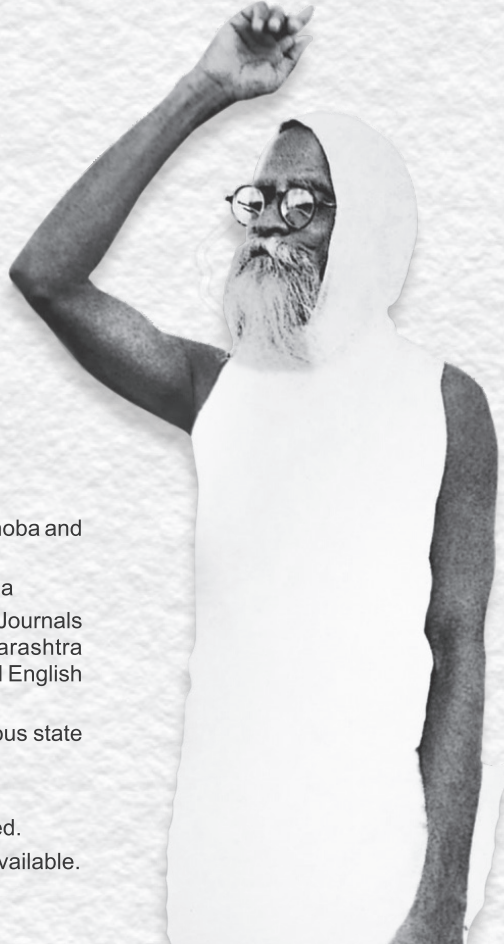
HOME ABOUT US BOOKS LIFE

Acharya Vinoba - a spiritual leader was also an academic scholar and had studied all religions in depth. He was a philosopher, well-known author, educationist and sociologist. He had initiated and lead the Bhoodan and Gramdan movement. Paramdham Prakashan (ग्रामसेवा मंडळ) Pavanar with the help of Maharashtra Knowledge Corporation Limited has developed www.vinoba.in website in which the entire literature of Acharya Vinoba is hosted.

**An eloquent insight into the thoughts of
Vinoba in his own words.....**

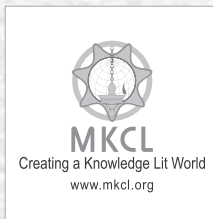
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Manifesto of Indian Farmers

Adopted by an assembly representing the farmers of India on the occasion of the historic Kisan Mukti March organised by the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee, Delhi, 30 November 2018.

We, The Farmers of India,

The producers of primary agricultural commodities;

- including women, dalit, nomadic and adivasi farmers;
- landowners, tenants, sharecroppers, agricultural labourers and plantation workers;
- fishworkers, milk producers, poultry farmers, livestock rearers, pastoralists, and collectors of minor forest produce; and,
- everyone engaged in crop cultivation, shifting cultivation, apiculture, sericulture, vermiculture, and agro-forestry;

Convinced that

- well-being of farmers is not just about economic survival of a majority of Indian households, it is about retaining our national dignity and our civilisational heritage;
- farmers are not just a residue from our past; farmers, agriculture and village community are integral to the future of India and the world; and,
- the demands of the farmers' movements are fully consistent with our Constitutional Vision,

Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy;

Recognising Our Responsibility

- as honest hard workers who face numerous odds;
- as bearers of historical knowledge, skills and culture;
- as agents of food safety, security and sovereignty; and
- as guardians of biodiversity and ecological sustainability;

Recalling the Principles of

- economic viability;
- ecological sustainability; and
- equality with social and economic justice;

Yet Alarmed at

- economic, ecological, social and existential crisis of Indian agriculture;
- ecological degradation and destruction affecting farmers and their livelihoods;
- unprecedented increase in diversion and destruction of agricultural land, privatisation of water, forced displacement, deprivation and migration affecting security of food and livelihood;

- persistent state of neglect of agriculture and discrimination against farming communities;
- increasing vulnerability of farmers to extortion by powerful village and government officials;
- deepening penetration of large, predatory and profiteering corporations that are already in control of significant sectors of Indian agriculture;
- spate of farmers' suicides across the country and unbearable burden of indebtedness;
- widening disparities between farmers and other sectors in our society; and,
- growing attack of governments on the farmers' struggles;

Solemnly Affirm Our Constitutional Right to

- life and dignified livelihood;
- social security and protection against natural and other calamities;
- land, water, forest and all natural resources including common property resources;
- diversity in seeds, food systems and sustainable technological choices; and,
- freedom of expression, organisation, representation and struggle through constitutional means for realisation of our demands and shaping our future;

Therefore, Call Upon the Parliament of India to Immediately

Hold a Special Session to address the agrarian crisis by passing and enacting the two Kisan Mukti Bills that are of, by and for the farmers of India, namely,

1. The Farmers' Freedom from Indebtedness Bill, 2018; and
2. The Farmers' Right to Guaranteed Remunerative Minimum Support Prices for

Agricultural Commodities Bill, 2018.

And Also Demand that the Government of India Must:

1. Increase the number of guaranteed employment days under MGNREGS to 200 days per family, and ensure wage payment within the period guaranteed by statute and at par with legal minimum wages for unskilled farm labour;
2. Reduce the cost of inputs for farmers either by regulating industry price or offering subsidy directly to farmers;
3. Provide comprehensive social security for all farm households including pension @ at least Rs. 5,000 per month per farmer above the age of 60;
4. Universalise the benefits of the Public Distribution System including cereals and nutri-cereals, pulses, sugar and oils without linking it to Aadhar or biometric identification and without shifting to direct cash transfer;
5. Address the menace of stray animals by removing all legal and vigilante-imposed restrictions on cattle trade, compensating farmers for destruction of crops by wild and stray animals and supporting animal shelters;
6. Stop land acquisition or land pooling without informed consent of the farmers; no acquisition or diversion of agricultural land for commercial land development or for creation of land banks; prevent the bypassing or dilution of The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and

Resettlement Act, 2013 at the state level; and evolve land use and agricultural land protection policy;

7. Mandate the sugar mills to pay interest @ 15% p.a. if cane dues are not paid to the cane-growers within 14 days of the delivery of cane; FRP of cane to be fixed by linking it to 9.5% recovery of sugar;
8. Withdraw pesticides that have been banned elsewhere and not approve GM seeds without a comprehensive needs, alternatives and impact assessment;
9. Disallow Foreign Direct Investment in agriculture and food processing, and remove agriculture from Free Trade Agreements, including the proposed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP);
10. Require identification and registration of all real cultivators including tenant farmers, sharecroppers, women farmers, lessee cultivators and rural workers etc. for purposes of accessing benefits of all government schemes; and
11. Stop uprooting adivasi farmers in the name of afforestation, ensure strict implementation without dilution of Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act and Forests Rights Act, 2006;

And, Further, Urge the Government to Evolve Policies to

12. Provide land and livelihood rights to the landless, including agricultural and homestead land, water for fishing, mining of minor minerals etc;

Babri Masjid: What Should Muslims do?

Irfan Engineer

13. Ensure timely, effective and adequate compensation for crop loss due to natural disasters; implement a comprehensive crop insurance that benefits farmers and not just insurance companies and that covers all types of risks for all crops and for all farmers, with individual farm as the unit of damage assessment; reverse anti-farmer changes in the Manual for Drought Management;
14. Build assured protective irrigation through sustainable means for farmers, especially in the rain-fed areas;
15. Ensure remunerative guaranteed prices for milk and its procurement for dairies and to supplement nutritional security through Mid Day Meal Scheme and Integrated Child Development Scheme etc;
16. Waive off all outstanding agricultural loans of farmers from suicide-affected families and provide special opportunities to children of such families;
17. Protect the farmers from corporate plunder in the name of contract farming by reviewing the Contract Farming Act 2018;
18. Promote procurement, processing and marketing under Farmer Producer Organisations and Peasant Cooperatives instead of corporatisation of agriculture and takeover by MNCs; and
19. Promote an agro-ecology paradigm that is based on suitable cropping patterns and local seed diversity revival, so as to build economically viable, ecologically sustainable, autonomous and climate resilient agriculture.

A section of Hindu supremacist organisations are once again mobilising to demand the construction of Ramjanmabhoomi temple (RJT) in Ayodhya on the spot where Babri Masjid once stood and was demolished on 6 December 1992. Provocative speeches are being made and threats are being issued. Sentiments of Hindus are being aroused around the construction of Ramjanmabhoomi temple. Media too is playing the ball and faithfully publicising the claims of Hindu supremacists that sentiments of all Hindus are being hurt and that the temple needs to be constructed immediately. The Hindu supremacists remember RJT as elections approach.

Most of the public speeches seeking to arouse the sentiments of Hindus around RJT accuse the Supreme Court of India to be insensitive to the feelings of Hindus and even discriminating against them. They argued that a terrorist, Yakub Memon, was given hearing at 3.00 am on 30 July 2015, as he was to be hanged till death the following morning. Adjourning the matter would have required a stay on his hanging, and not hearing his final plea would have left the court open to the charge of not doing justice. Therefore, the charge that the apex court does not have time to hear the “issues of Hindus” is without any basis.

Besides comparing apples and oranges, their outbursts also amount to contempt of court as they are discourteous towards the court and seek to lower the dignity of the

court. They are also interfering in the dispensation of justice by resorting to intimidation. Why is the apex court not proceeding for contempt of court suo moto against all those who make such provocative statements perhaps tells its own story.

The Hindu supremacists are deliberately twisting the facts about the issues involved in the Babri Masjid–RJT case. Basically the case pertains to title suit of 2.77 acres of land on which Babri Masjid once stood and was demolished on 6 December 1992. Who was the legal owner of the parcel of land in question and the structure on it?

Through political mobilisation, the Hindu supremacists have been successful in converting the title suit into an issue of faith according to which Hindus believe the land parcel to be the birth place of Lord Ram. Since they believe so, their faith should reign supreme, and disregarding legal issues, the parcel of land should be handed over to them for construction of RJT. They further argue that Muslims have not prayed in the Babri Masjid since 1949 and therefore the place is not a mosque any more. Further, they argue that Muslims can pray anywhere and therefore it is not essential and integral part of their religion. Some even argue that since the Babri Masjid was constructed after the demolition of a temple, it was done so in violation of tenets of Islam and therefore it was never a mosque. Be as it may, it is for the apex court to do justice on the basis of laws as applicable in the land.

The dispute is not for temple or mosque anymore

Although the dispute appears to be between the Hindu community and the Muslim community, it is not so! That is what the Hindu supremacists want to turn the dispute into. If it becomes one between the two communities, then on the basis of sheer might of numbers and levers of power controlled by the elite of the Hindu community, the Hindu supremacists stand to win hands down! Construction of RJT has become a milestone in asserting 'faith' and power of the Hindu supremacists. All Hindus are not Ram bhaktas and all Ram bhaktas are not in favour of the RJT on the very spot where Babri Masjid was demolished.

Although the issue—whether Hindus believe that Lord Ram was born on the very spot where Babri Masjid once stood, was answered by the Allahabad High Court in affirmative, the Hon'ble court did not have any sufficient material to reach the conclusion. There was no referendum or even a fairly representative survey carried out to ascertain beliefs of the members of Hindu community on the issue. The constant mobilisation by Hindu supremacist and the nature of media coverage may have coloured the judgement of the court. South of Vindhyas, the issue of RJT and place of birth of Lord Ram is of much less consequence than the north. The working classes and castes are much less bothered as to where Lord Ram was born, although they have firm faith in Lord Ram. Dalit leader Chandrashekhar Azad has in fact named himself "Ravan".

Before the year 1985, the question, 'where precisely was Lord Ram born?' would not have

been answered with certainty by most Hindus, including those in Ayodhya. Overwhelming number of Hindus would have been clueless, except saying that the Lord was born in Ayodhya. Ayodhya city has more than 14 temples located in various places claiming to be on Ramjanmabhoomi which have now been demolished to make way for another one. The faith pertaining to a precise spot where Lord Ram was born has been constructed in the late eighties using mobilisation for political outcomes aided by the mass media.

The plea of supremacy of faith over facts and law is not a religious project but a political agenda. For, to privilege faith of one section of populace sharing a particular religion over other faiths, and more importantly over demonstrable truths, requires a theocratic state, not a democratic state which gives space to all religions, faiths and beliefs subject to certain reasonable restrictions in the interest of peace, harmony, equality, liberties and dignity of all individuals. The mobilisation of gullible sections willing to subscribe to the faith being propounded by Hindu supremacists, forcing the state to hand over the parcel of land based on their faith for construction of RJT, is therefore a political mobilisation to hammer nails in the coffin of democracy. More than construction of RJT, the Hindu supremacists are keen on dismantling the democratic state which affords more or less equal space to all faiths subject to certain reasonable restrictions. That is why there were series of mobilisations and show of strength by various Hindu supremacist organisations, including Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Hindu Mahasabha, Dharmasabha

and Shiv Sena. Their target was the Supreme Court which they do not seem to trust, fearing that Supreme Court's outcome might not be based on faith but law and justice. Their demand was that the Parliament pass a legislation to hand over the entire land on which Babri Masjid once stood for the construction of RJT. Construction of RJT on ruins of Babri Masjid is simultaneously laying the foundation stone of Hindu Rashtra, a communal state that privileges the elite of Hindu community and relegates the rest who do not subscribe to Hindutva political ideology and its faith to second class citizens without any rights.

The conflict therefore is not between Hindu community and Muslim community, but between those who want India to be democratic, diverse and liberal, respecting all faiths, including that of rationalists and atheists, dignity of all individuals and equality of all citizens on the one hand, and those who want India to be one homogenous society with the state regimenting religion, where state and community elders overlook matrimonial alliances, where faith and truth are what the community elites declare them to be so. That latter notion is against Hindu religion as propounded by great saints like Kabir, Ravi Das, Mirabai, Chokha Mela, Aakho, Narsi Mehta, Sree Naryana Guru, Basavanna, Swami Vivekananda, Guru Nanak, Buddha, and many other saints.

Muslims should leave resolution of the dispute regarding Babri Masjid-RJT to the Supreme Court and to those Hindus who follow the saints mentioned above. It is more important to defend the Constitution and constitutional idea of diverse,

inclusive India where all citizens enjoy equal rights, liberties of thought, expression and conscience, where dignity of all citizens is upheld and there is social justice. The difficulty is that the religious leaders and political elite of the Muslim community also do not desire the idea of India which is democratic and respects the Constitution. They too give precedence to their faith over the Constitution, law, liberties and social justice. This was evident from the affidavit they filed in the Supreme Court in support of triple talaq denying equality to women on the plea of right to follow their religious laws or Muslim Personal Law. This was also in evidence when they demanded ban on Salman Rushdie's book *Satanic Verses*, and when they mobilised to oppose the Shah Bano judgement that granted maintenance to a divorced Muslim woman under section 125 of the Indian Penal Code.

In fact the demand to open the locks of RJT for darshan and worship of Lord Ram and construction of a grand RJT got a tremendous boost after they forced the Rajiv Gandhi Government to bring in a law in Parliament to reverse the Shah Bano judgement of the Supreme Court.

The Muslim community and its political leaders are doing well by maintaining silence over the Babri Masjid–Ramjanmabhoomi dispute. They are neither giving in to the pressure of mobilisation by Hindu supremacists, nor are they defiantly opposing construction of the RJT, and instead are subjecting themselves to the judgment of the Supreme Court. The Hindu supremacist have succeeded only in getting some degenerate leaders of the community to do the bidding for them.

The Muslim community needs to focus on secular education as Sir Sayyid did in the late 19th century. Education would enable members of the community to join the civil services and other important professions. Matured intellectual leadership of the community can come only from the educated class that can steer them out of their social and educational backwardness.

The political leadership of the community needs to address itself to the issues of security and communal violence along with discrimination, seeking justice and remedies through constitutional mechanisms. In order to be able to do so, the leadership will have to build alliances with other marginalised classes who face similar discrimination, oppression and violence in their daily life. The alliance with other marginalised groups should not be opportunistic and only for political power, but should seek political power to build robust democratic institutions that defend human rights of all citizens,

deepen democracy and build a democratic state that is accountable to its citizens. The Muslim political leadership should apply itself to building structures of accountability and institutional mechanisms like Equal Opportunity Commission.

The political, intellectual and religious leadership of the community needs to apply itself to reforms in family laws that are within the framework of Islam as well as the Constitution. Presently, it resists any reforms even though many Muslim countries have carried out reforms. Reforms should particularly ensure equality and equal status of women in the community in accordance with the Quranic spirit.

If these steps are debated within the community and followed, it would go a long way in weakening the Hindu supremacists. More than Babri Masjid, we need a democratic India, educated India and an India that embraces gender justice and diversity.

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The Ease of Killing a Policeman in Adityanath's Uttar Pradesh

Harish Khare

A warning shot has been fired. The bullet that killed inspector Subodh Kumar Singh in Bulandshahr carries a chilling message for every policeman and policewoman across the nation: don't mess with the Hindutva warrior, he is armed with a gun. And this is New India, where impunity has already been granted to one and all for killing any Muslim in the name of protecting the cow. Now, an entitlement is being claimed for meting out mob justice in defence of the cow.

The warning is unmistakable: police officers who dare to stand up to the lumpen 'gau raksha' mobs and try to enforce the law do so at their own risk. And the risks will multiply. May be the nation has been repaid a hefty Yogi Dividend.

Perhaps it can be argued that ruling India is no longer just the business of a Narendra Modi–Amit Shah holding company. A new, aggressive partner, Yogi Adityanath, has crow-barred his way into this exclusive partnership. No doubt,

the Uttar Pradesh chief minister has infused new energy and new verve in an otherwise bankrupt and faltering enterprise; suddenly, this mofussil man has become the defining voice of the New India, and he is painting the Modi dispensation in the colours of his own medieval nastiness.

Yogi Adityanath is an incongruity in any civilised, modern polity, and his ascendancy to the Uttar Pradesh gaddi mocks all our pretence at being a 'world power'. Yet this mahant has been elevated as a star campaigner in the Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Telangana assembly elections; he seems to have been armed with a licence to inject communal venom and divisiveness, all cynically aimed at preserving the BJP's crumbling Hindu vote-bank.

It should be no surprise that the Yogi's onward march has worked up a stink beyond the poll-bound states. The Uttar Pradesh chief minister has managed to carve out a national presence only because the Modi regime's romance with violence has prepared the nation for Yogi's blunt messages. In the past four years, mobs have been empowered as an instrument of intimidation and retribution.

The ceaseless invocation of "terror," Pakistan and Islam has produced a psychology of implacable anger and animosity towards India's own minorities. Starting with the discovery of 'sedition' at Jawaharlal Nehru University, we have established a protocol that anyone suspected of lacking in deshbhakti can be placed at the mercy of the 'nationalist' mob; suspects can be lynched on campus and in television studios. And recently, we have discovered the overriding appeal of aastha, or faith, which must be asserted in the

streets and in defiance of the apex court when necessary.

In this officially sanctioned climate of retaliation and vengeance, it was only natural that a mob of 'gau rakshaks' should have shot dead police inspector Singh. The killer mob must have felt totally at ease in Yogi's Uttar Pradesh.

The Modi dispensation has brought to India a new ease of killing policemen, just as it has the much touted 'ease of doing business' in India. We must wait for those hired economists and other pamphleteers at the NITI Aayog to square the two "eases", but it can be easily predicted that the global community is not going to be exactly thrilled with an India that is degenerating effortlessly into a battleground for settling medieval scores.

No foreign businessman is going to come and 'make it in India' if the headlines continue to sizzle with reports of violence and lawlessness. And, the Modi-Yogi-Shah regime would not be the first cabal to overestimate its capacity to roll-back marauding crowds. No regime has ever succeeded in calibrating mobs on the streets.

Whatever narrative the Sangh parivar spin-masters may be able to invent for the cold-blooded murder of a police officer, the reverberations from Bulandshahr will continue to linger. We do not know if the emergence of Yogi Adityanath as the new mascot of our New India has caused any disquiet among all those who desperately want to believe in Modi and his promise of economic modernisation. For many of them, their hopes stood belied when Modi inflicted on India that experiment in Fiscal Maoism called demonetisation. Every businessman is discovering that the dreaded

inspector raj is back with a bang. And now, we have Adityanath mocking the dreams and designs of the 'Modi-the-moderniser' constituency, located mostly in Corporate India.

While the corporates have insulated themselves in their own islands of security and prosperity, it is the vast middle classes who would be frightened to the very core at the prospect of empowered mobs gunning down police inspectors. They may have a very justifiable anxiety about terrorism from across the border but they can be relied upon to figure out for themselves that what happened in Bulandshar was terror in the streets. This kind of killing will not be acceptable to them.

India's middle classes—who are, incidentally, overwhelmingly Hindu—desperately crave stability and peace in their neighbourhood, in their city and in the nation. They want to be assured of some kind of peaceful order prevailing. Because they are keenly conscious of the precariousness of our civic order, they have a vested interest in preserving the efficacy and ability of the policeman to uphold the magistracy of the law. They frown upon and disapprove of all those who appear to be countenancing lawlessness.

They can see that lawlessness and defiance of the courts seem to be main working principles in New India. The Modi-Yogi-Shah dispensation is quietly encouraging the 'mandir crowd' to ratchet up the truculence in Ayodhya. It is this cynical molly-coddling of assorted sadhus and sants, all chanting the 'aastha' mantra, that has emboldened the murderous mob in Bulandshahr. What should be truly worrisome to the middle classes is that the gau

rashak's violence and intimidation have come to be valued as tools of electoral mobilisation.

The message from Bulandshahr is that our new saviours in this New

India will go to any length to try to perpetuate themselves in power, even if it means unleashing chaos and violence in the cities and villages

across the land. This all adds up to a calculated suborning of public authority, inspired from above. Bulandshahr today, India tomorrow.

Another Time, Another Mosque

Dilip Simeon

Gandhi's Last Fast: January 13–18, 1948

From September 1947, the communal situation in north India became grievous. Massacres were taking place in Punjab and Sindh, sparking off the migration of over ten million Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. In September, hundreds of Muslims of Delhi had been killed in Karol Bagh, Subzi Mandi and Paharganj. Tens of thousands of Hindu and Sikh refugees from Punjab were crammed into Diwan Hall, Chandni Chowk and Kingsway Camp; while thousands of Muslims, including Meos from Alwar and Bharatpur, camped in fear in Jamia Millia, Puran Qila and Humayun's Tomb. The life of Dr Zakir Husain, VC of Jamia Millia and president of the Hindustani Talimi Sangh, was saved by a Sikh army captain and a Hindu railway official. Upon arrival in Delhi on September 9, Gandhi was asked to stay not in the sweepers colony (his preferred residence in the city), but in Birla House. Gandhi plunged into the turmoil around him, travelling to nearby places, talking to refugees and cadres of social organisations. On December 22, he made this announcement at his prayer meeting:

"Some eight or ten miles from here, at Mehrauli, there is a shrine of Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Chisti. Esteemed as second only to the shrine at Ajmer, it is visited every

year not only by Muslims but by thousands of non-Muslims too. Last September this shrine was subjected to the wrath of Hindu mobs. The Muslims living in the vicinity of the shrine for the last 800 years had to leave their homes. I mention this sad episode to tell you that, though Muslims love the shrine, today no Muslim can be found anywhere near it. It is the duty of the Hindus, Sikhs, the officials and the Government to open the shrine again and wash off this stain on us. The same applies to other shrines and religious places of Muslims in and around Delhi. The time has come when both India and Pakistan must unequivocally declare to the majorities in each country that they will not tolerate desecration of religious places, be they small or big. They should also undertake to repair the places damaged during riots."

This was the background to his last protest. There was also the matter of the Government's decision to withhold payment of Pakistan's share of undivided India's sterling balance. We may take it that the fast was undertaken both to restore the mosque and to convey to the public his feelings about ongoing events. It began on January 13, 1948 and was announced at his prayer meeting that evening. He said: "Now that I have started my fast many people cannot understand what I am doing, who are the offenders—Hindus or Sikhs or Muslims. How long will the fast

last? I say I do not blame anyone. Who am I to accuse others? I have said that we have all sinned."

He continued: "I shall terminate the fast only when peace has returned to Delhi. If peace is restored to Delhi it will have effect not only on the whole of India but also on Pakistan and when that happens, a Muslim can walk around in the city all by himself. I shall then terminate the fast. Delhi is the capital of India. It has always been the capital of India. So long as things do not return to normal in Delhi, they will not be normal either in India or in Pakistan. Today I cannot bring Suhrawardy here because I fear someone may insult him. Today he cannot walk about in the streets of Delhi. If he did he would be assaulted. What I want is that he should be able to move about here even in the dark. It is true that he made efforts in Calcutta only when Muslims became involved. Still, he could have made the situation worse, if he had wanted, but he did not want to make things worse. He made the Muslims evacuate the places they had forcibly occupied and said that he being the Premier could do so. Although the places occupied by the Muslims belonged to Hindus and Sikhs, he did his duty. Even if it takes a whole month to have real peace established in Delhi, it does not matter. People should not do anything merely to have me terminate the fast. So my wish is that

Hindus, Sikhs, Parsis, Christians and Muslims who are in India should continue to live in India and India should become a country where everyone's life and property are safe. Only then will India progress."

The People's Reaction

Delhi was visibly affected by Gandhi's fast. Addressing a gathering of three hundred thousand people on January 17, Maulana Azad announced seven tests given him by Gandhi to be fulfilled and guaranteed by responsible people. They included freedom of worship to Muslims at the tomb of Khwaja Bakhtiar Chishti; non-interference with the Urs festival due to be held there; the voluntary evacuation by non-Muslims of all mosques in Delhi that were being used as houses or which had been converted into temples; free movement of Muslims in areas where they used to stay; complete safety to Muslims while travelling by train; no economic boycott of Muslims; and, freedom to Muslim evacuees to return to Delhi." That evening a procession of citizens walked to Birla House where Jawaharlal Nehru addressed them. Gandhi's speech was read out at the prayer meeting, attended by some four thousand people. Among other things, he said:

"My fast should not be considered a political move in any sense of the term. It is in obedience to the peremptory call of conscience and duty. It comes out of felt agony. I call to witness all my numerous Muslim friends in Delhi. Their representatives meet me almost every day to report the day's events. Neither Rajas and Maharajas nor Hindus and Sikhs or any others would serve themselves or India as a whole, if at this, what is to me

a sacred juncture, they mislead me with a view to terminating my fast."

On January 18, Gandhi ended his fast. Over a hundred representatives of various groups and organisations including the Hindu Mahasabha, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Jamiat-ul-Ulema who had assembled at Rajendra Prasad's residence, called on Gandhiji at 11.30 am. Those present included Jawaharlal Nehru, Abul Kalam Azad, Rajendra Prasad, INA General Shah Nawaz Khan, Hifzur Rahman and Zaheed Hussain, Pakistan's High Commissioner. Dr Rajendra Prasad reported that even those who had some doubts on the previous night were confident that they could ask Gandhiji with a full sense of responsibility to break the fast. As the President of the Congress, Rajendra Prasad said that he had signed the document in view of the guarantee which they had all jointly and severally given. Khurshid, the Chief Commissioner and Randhawa, Deputy Commissioner of Delhi, had signed the document on behalf of the administration. It had been decided to set up a number of committees to implement the pledge. Rajendra Prasad hoped that Gandhiji would now terminate his fast. Deshbandhu Gupta described scenes of fraternisation between Hindus and Muslims which he had witnessed when a procession of Muslims was taken out that morning in Subzimandi and was received with ovation and offered fruit and refreshments by the Hindu inhabitants. A seven-point declaration in Hindi was read out solemnly affirming the people's desire for communal harmony and civic peace. This read as follows:

Seven-Point Delhi Declaration of January 18, 1948

"We wish to announce that it is our heart-felt desire that the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs and members of the other communities should once again live in Delhi like brothers and in perfect amity and we take the pledge that we shall protect the life, property and faith of Muslims and that the incidents which have taken place in Delhi will not happen again.

"We want to assure Gandhiji that the annual fair at Khwaja Qutub-ud-Din Mazar will be held this year as in the previous years.

"Muslims will be able to move about in Subzimandi, Karol Bagh, Paharganj and other localities just as they could in the past.

"The mosques which have been left by Muslims and which now are in the possession of Hindus and Sikhs will be returned. The areas which have been set apart for Muslims will not be forcibly occupied.

"We shall not object to the return to Delhi of the Muslims who have migrated from here if they choose to come back and Muslims shall be able to carry on their business as before.

"We assure that all these things will be done by our personal effort and not with the help of the police or military.

"We request Mahatmaji to believe us and to give up his fast and continue to lead us as he has done hitherto."

Gandhi's Speech on the Delhi Declaration

In his reply, Gandhi said:

"I am happy to hear what you have told me, but if you have overlooked one point all this will be worth nothing. If this declaration means that you will safeguard Delhi and whatever happens outside Delhi will be no concern of yours, you

will be committing a grave error and it will be sheer foolishness on my part to break my fast. You must have seen the Press reports of the happenings in Allahabad. If not, look them up. I understand that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Hindu Mahasabha are among the signatories to this declaration. It will amount to breach of faith on their part if they hold themselves responsible for peace in Delhi, but not in other places. I have been observing that this sort of deception is being practised in the country these days on a large scale. Delhi is the heart—the capital of India. The leaders from the whole of India have assembled here. Men had become beasts. But if those who have assembled here, who constitute the cream among men, cannot make the whole of India understand that Hindus, Muslims and followers of other religions are like brothers, it bodes ill for both the Dominions. What will be the fate of India if we continue to quarrel with one another? . . . Let us take no step that may become a cause for repentance later on. The situation demands courage of the highest order from us. We have to consider whether or not we can accomplish what we are going to promise. If you are not confident of fulfilling your pledge, do not ask me to give up my fast. It is for you and the whole of India to translate it into reality. It may not be possible to realise it in a day. I do not possess the requisite strength for it. But I can assure you that till today our face was turned towards Satan, we have now resolved to turn towards God. If what I have told you fails to find an echo in your hearts or if you are convinced that it is beyond you, tell me so frankly.

“What greater folly can there

be than to claim that Hindustan is only for Hindus and Pakistan is for Muslims alone? The refugees here should realise that things in Pakistan will be set right by the example set in Delhi. I am not one to be afraid of fasting. Time and again I have gone on fasts and if occasion arises I may again do so. Whatever therefore you do, do after careful thought and consideration. The Muslim friends frequently meet me and assure me that peaceful atmosphere has been restored in Delhi and Hindus and Muslims can live in amity here. If these friends have any misgivings in their hearts and feel that today they have perforce to stay here—as they have nowhere else to go to—but ultimately they will have to part company, let them admit it to me frankly. To set things right in the whole of India and Pakistan is no doubt a Herculean task. But I am an optimist. Once I resolve to do something I refuse to accept defeat. Today you assure me that Hindus and Muslims have become one, but if Hindus continue to regard Muslims as Yavans and asuras, incapable of realising God, and Muslims regard Hindus likewise, it will be the worst kind of blasphemy. A Muslim friend presented me with a book in Patna. Its author is an eminent Muslim. The book says: ‘God ordains that a kafir—and a Hindu is a kafir—is worse than a poisonous creature. He should be exterminated. It is one’s duty to be treacherous to him. Why should one treat him with any courtesy?’ If Muslims still harbouring such thoughts assure Hindus about their good behaviour, they will only be deceiving Hindus. If you betray one you betray all. If I truly worship a stone image I deceive no one. For me God resides in that stone image. I feel that if the hearts

of both Hindus and Muslims are full of deceit and treachery, why need I continue to live? . . .

“After listening to all that I have said, if you still ask me to end my fast I shall end it. Afterwards you have to release me. I had taken the vow to do or die in Delhi and now if I am able to achieve success here I shall go to Pakistan and try to make Muslims understand their folly. Whatever happens in other places, people in Delhi should maintain peace. The refugees here should realise that they have to welcome as brothers the Muslims returning from Pakistan to Delhi. The Muslim refugees in Pakistan are suffering acute hardships and so are the Hindu refugees here. Hindus have not learnt all the crafts of Muslim craftsmen. Therefore they had better return to India. There are good men as well as bad men in all the communities. Taking into consideration all these implications, if you ask me to break my fast I shall abide by your wish. India will virtually become a prison if the present conditions continue. It may be better that you allow me to continue my fast and if God wills it He will call me.”

Maulana Azad said that the remarks about non-Muslims to which Gandhiji had referred were abhorrent to Islam. They were symptoms of the insanity that had seized some sections of the people. Maulana Hifzur Rahman insisted that Muslims wanted to remain in India as citizens with self-respect and honour. He welcomed the changed atmosphere in the city as a result of Gandhi’s fast and appealed to Gandhi to break the fast. On behalf of the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS, Ganesh Datt reiterated the appeal. Pakistan’s High Commissioner Zaheed Hussain

addressed a few words to Gandhiji. He said he was there to convey the deep concern of the Pakistani people about him and the anxious inquiries they made every day about his health. It was their hearts' desire that circumstances might soon enable him to break the fast. If there was anything that he could do towards that end he was ready and so were the people of Pakistan. Zaheed Hussain was followed by Khurshid and Randhawa who on behalf of the administration reiterated the assurance that all the conditions mentioned in the citizens' pledge would be implemented, and no effort would be spared to restore the Indian capital to its traditional harmony and peace. Sardar Harbans Singh endorsed the appeal on behalf of the Sikhs. When Rajendra Prasad said: "I have signed on behalf of the people, please break your fast," Gandhi replied: "I shall break my fast. Let God's will prevail. You all be witness today."

Twelve days later, on January 30, 1948, Gandhi was murdered at his daily prayer meeting.

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The Maratha Agitation for Reservations: Part II

Neeraj Jain

In the previous article, we had analysed how the demand for reservations being raised by the Maratha community and the government bowing to their demand and granting them 16% reservation is not going to result in the creation of any significant jobs for these youth. In this article, we discuss some of the demands that need to be raised, not just by the Maratha youth but by youth of all communities together, 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 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 in Part I of this article), 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 45,034.¹ 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 Jobs in the Large Scale Private Sector

As mentioned above, job creation in the Indian factory sector has slowed down considerably. With the result that only 2.5% of the total workforce in the country in 2009–10 was employed in factories, and this includes both small and large factories! The Niti Aayog, the government’s policy think-tank, has admitted in a report that the few jobs being created in India’s manufacturing sector are

mostly being created in small-scale industries. Consequently, small firms employing less than 20 workers contributed 12% of the manufacturing output in the country, but employed 72% of the country’s manufacturing workforce (in 2010–11). Similarly, in the service sector, a 2006–07 NSSO survey of service firms found that the 650 largest enterprises accounted for 38% of the output of this sector, but employed only 2% of service workers.²

As it is, large firms employ less workers due to high mechanisation levels. Now, taking advantage of the recent steps taken by the Government of India to introduce hire-and-fire policies in industry, they are retrenching permanent workers and replacing them by contract workers. While these contract workers are often forced to work longer hours than permanent workers, they are paid much less and they also have no social security. Therefore, the increase in productivity has not benefited workers. Data from the Annual Survey of Industries shows that while real productivity of workers in the three decades to 2013

has increased at an annual average of 7%, real wages of workers have been virtually stagnant, increasing at an average annual rate of 1% only between 1983 and 2013.³

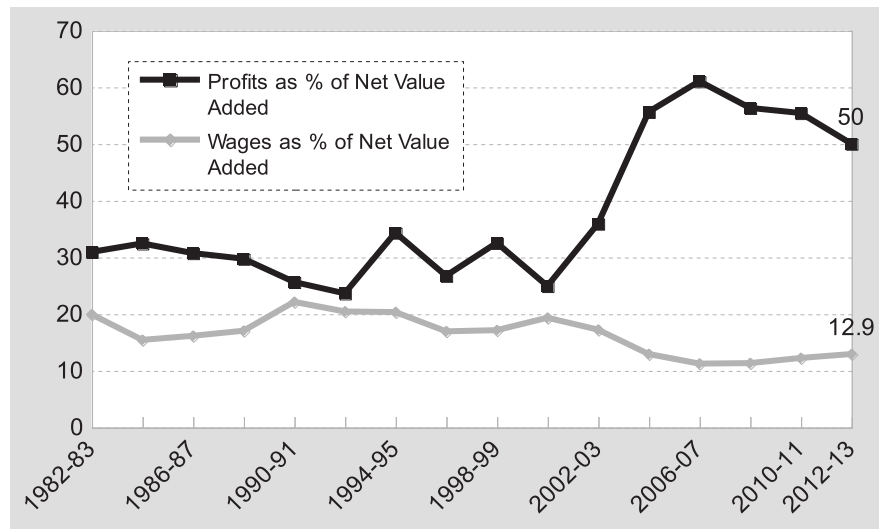
This has resulted in a huge rise in profits for the capitalist owners of these firms; they have almost exclusively cornered the gains resulting from the rise in productivity. This can be clearly seen from Chart 1 which shows that:

- Wages as percentage of net value added in industries have actually fallen from 30.9% in 1982–83 and 25.6% in 1990–91 to 12.9% in 2012–13;
- On the other hand, profits as percentage of net value added have risen sharply during the post-reform period: from 19.9% in 1982–83 and 22.1% in 1990–91 to 50.0% in 2012–13.

These are average figures for all industries. Obviously, the large-scale industries must be earning even higher profits and paying out lower wages than these averages.

Such being the huge profits being made by large-scale industries, let us come together and demand that

Chart 1: Profits and Wages as % of Net Value Added in Indian Industry, 1982–83 to 2012–13⁴



large factories increase the number of workers employed by them by reducing working hours by half, that is, to 4 hours per day (without reducing wages). That would result in a doubling of the number of workers employed in large-scale factories. Orthodox economists would call our proposal ridiculous, claiming it would lead to large-scale industries suffering huge losses, forcing them to shut down. But as we can see from Chart 1 above, in 2012–13, while wages as percentage of net value added were only 12.9%, profits as percentage of net value added were 50%. Therefore, if wage costs for large-scale industry doubled, they would not be driven into loss, they would still be making considerable profits—their profits would still be 37% of net value added. Furthermore, since employment would increase, it will lead to an increase in demand, and so large industries which today are working at much below full capacity (capacity utilisation in Indian industry is at around 72% today⁵) will be able to increase production and improve capacity utilisation, leading to further rise in profits.

There are 16 million employed in the organised manufacturing sector. Of this, around 30% or 5 million are employed in large-scale industry, according to Niti Aayog.⁶ Doubling employment in large-scale industry would therefore lead to the creation of around 5 million jobs, and more via the multiplier effect.

iv) 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.⁷ 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 Population⁸

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!⁹

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!¹⁰

- 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.¹¹ 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.¹²

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.¹³

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.¹⁴ 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.

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Climate Activists Take Civil Disobedience World-Wide

Chloé Farand

More than 100 people were arrested during a week of action across the UK as protesters demanded the government treat the threats posed by climate change as a crisis and take drastic steps to cut emissions to net zero by 2025.

Thousands of people joined a mass protest that blocked roads and bridges in central London, with some gluing themselves to government buildings to draw attention to what they see as climate breakdown.

This was the birth of Extinction Rebellion, a movement that calls for mass economic disruption using non-violent direct action and civil disobedience to halt the destruction of the planet and its wildlife and prevent catastrophic climate change.

Around the world, environmental campaign groups and activists watched the action unfold. In London, there is a growing hope that this could be the start to a new form of international mobilisation for climate action.

‘A game changer’

From the US to Ghana and New Zealand to Western Europe, campaigners have shown enthusiastic support for Extinction Rebellion’s declaration of climate emergency.

Jamie Henn, co-founder of the campaign group 350, said watching the launch of Extinction Rebellion in London from the US had been “incredibly exciting” and embodied “a growing sense of anger and desire for radical solutions”.

Henn said he was confident Extinction Rebellion would inspire similar non-violent direct climate actions in the US over the coming months, but whether the movement was one that could endure the test of time was yet to be seen.

Margaret Klein Salamon, founder of the US grassroots group Climate Mobilisation, said she believed Extinction Rebellion is “a game changer” for the climate movement.

She is part of a team of dedicated

activists working on Extinction Rebellion's international expansion, ensuring it has a robust enough infrastructure and resources to give the movement the capacity and stamina to organise in the long-term.

Salamon said Extinction Rebellion was born as the climate movement was shifting away from advocating gradual change to demanding immediate action in line with the scale of the climate crisis.

She said that for the first time, Extinction Rebellion set out the full implications of climate change on humanity and the planet's ecosystems without shielding people from the consequences of the crisis for fear of being too alarming.

She added that Extinction Rebellion was advocating solutions that may have long been seen as impossible, but which the group believe could gather mainstream momentum.

Above all, Salamon said the use of peaceful civil disobedience as a means to engage people in "power struggles" against governments and demand meaningful change is what made Extinction Rebellion unique.

"There is so much momentum around Extinction Rebellion and what is needed is to be able to escalate the disruption," she said, adding: "This is still a very young movement but there is tremendous enthusiasm for it."

Extinction Rebellion's first public action was to occupy the Greenpeace headquarters in London — a move which took the climate movement in the UK by surprise and aimed to warn environmental NGOs against becoming complacent about governments' inaction on climate change.

Learning from past grassroots movements such as Gandhi's

independence marches, the Suffragettes, the Civil Rights movement and Occupy, Extinction Rebellion claims to aim to rally support worldwide around a common sense of urgency to tackle climate breakdown.

International rebellion

Robin Boardman, a coordinator with Extinction Rebellion in the UK, said the week of action that took place across the country was "a prototype for what a global resistance could look like".

Pointing out that the UK is responsible for only one percent of current global emissions, Boardman added: "What happened in London is a drop in a pond compared to what could happen worldwide in months to come".

Extinction Rebellion is working to establish campaign groups beyond the UK, with coordinators already working in the US, Canada, Australia, Switzerland, France, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Italy and Spain.

But much of the movement's international expansion is focused on the US.

"Like in the Arab spring, Tunisia started the uprising but it was not until it spread to Egypt that the whole movement gripped the Middle East," Boardman said.

Inspired by US Senator Bernie Sanders' 2016 presidential campaign, Extinction Rebellion wants to export its non-violent rebellion model and ambition of a widespread system change but allow for autonomous campaign groups to organise independently across the world.

"It is up for local groups as to whether people should be taking up action and what direction they

move in. It's about doing something different and shifting what is acceptable in the context of the climate crisis. When society is ready to lose its sense of fear in the face of state authority, then everything crumbles and change can happen," Boardman said.

Extinction Rebellion has attracted much support from religious groups, including Christian Climate Action, which had several of its members arrested in the UK last week.

Caroline Harmon, from the Christian Climate Action, said that her group has received messages of support from Christian communities across the world, who have been inspired by last week's actions.

The first Extinction Rebellion action on the African continent was held earlier this month in front of a church in Accra, Ghana, where dozens of climate activists carrying Extinction Rebellion placards told churchgoers about the global climate resistance being born in the UK.

Mawuse Yao Agorkor, a grassroots social activist from Ghana and the general secretary of the West African Vazoba network, said the launch of Extinction Rebellion in London was "an exciting moment" and that he was hoping larger protests would "hit the streets of Ghana soon".

The Vazoba network has long campaigned against deforestation, the use of toxic chemical and mining in the region and now hopes to use its organising tools and contacts across West Africa to spread Extinction Rebellion's message.

Agorkor said he was not afraid of using civil disobedience as a means to ramp up pressure on his government. "I have been working on the ground for six years, and getting arrested for protesting in the

interest of our planet is something that my group is not afraid of,” he said.

Agorkor is well aware that if the movement is to spread through Africa, it will have to adapt in places where police brutality is common fortune and protesters could be met with open fire. But for now, Agorkor believes the organising capacity of both Vazoba and Extinction Rebellion constitute “a good starting point”.

Diverse Movement

The emergence of Extinction Rebellion also comes at a time of great change in the US climate movement.

For Henn, of 350, Sanders’ presidential campaign, which inspired Extinction Rebellion’s mobilisation strategy, gave place to a new generation of young leaders including more women and people of colour — a trend reflected in the US’ Congressional midterm elections.

Newly elected liberals, led by the 29-year-old Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, are demanding the Democrats back a “Green New Deal” to rapidly transform the economy to 100 percent renewable energy in a decade — a target largely in line with Extinction Rebellion’s own demand to reach net zero by 2025.

Henn said that the only way in which the Extinction Rebellion movement would take off in the US would be by “moving away from a climate movement that is predominantly made up of older, middle-class white people”.

Instead, Henn said Extinction Rebellion had “to build a multi-racial and multi-generational movement which will include young people

of colour in its leadership and tackle issues such as equity and environmental justice”.

For Henn, the movement will also have to ensure it uses a universal language that inspires urgency but respects and reflects the experiences of those living on the frontlines.

Referring to a banner that was dropped from Westminster bridge in

central London last week and read “Climate Change, We Are F**d”, he added:

“It is one thing to say such things from the safety of London, but it’s another if you are living on the frontline of climate impacts.

“Some people don’t have the privilege to give up”.

The Protests in Argentina and France: Where is the Co-relation?

Peter Koenig

What do Argentinian protesters have in common with French protesters? They both strongly dislike their governments, and their leaders.

The protests in Argentina against the upcoming G20 meeting and around the IMF are just a pretext for an overall malaise—which is an understatement—vis-à-vis President Mauricio Macri and his debt-driven austerity program, that has left hundreds of thousands jobless. People who had decent jobs under the Kirchner governments have now joined the ranks of the unemployed and are begging for survival. Macri has driven the poverty rate from about 14%, where it was in November 2015, a months before the Presidential elections, to more than 35% in September 2018—and all the while increasing tariffs for transportation and basic services such as electricity, gas, water, health care, education—in fact, privatising such vital public services to the point where only higher middle class and elite can afford them.

That of course, will leave a vast majority of the people uneducated and without basic health care—

precisely what neoliberalism wants. Decimating the number of poor people to a minimum needed for useful slavehood and leaving those who vegetate along, struggling for one meal at the time without education, without a job, so they don’t have the time, energy and political savvy to protest against the ruling class.

Greece is another outstanding example. Within less than ten years the once cheerful, happy and economically relatively well-off country was destroyed into misery by foreign imposed debt and austerity programs. By now, almost all public assets have been sold or privatised to pay for the horrendous debt service. Public health services are on a drip, there is a lack of special medication, like for cancer, schools are closed or privatised, pensions cut to unlivable levels, unemployment rampant—all leading to extreme poverty and skyrocketing suicide rates, about which nobody dares speaking.

Is Argentina going to become under Macri the Latin American Greece? Could well be. By now the country is encircled by neoliberal

and fascist neighbors—Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay. Bolivia is a laudable exception. All the others will do what Washington mandates; whatever it takes to support Macri and his IMF-imposed economic killer policies, that—in the end—will sell out the resource-rich country to foreign oligarchs and corporations, to the US and NATO. Yes NATO, unbelievable, but true. NATO is officially in south America, as Colombia by her own choice has become a NATO country.

From Colombia to Argentina and actually to all of Latin America is like a walk in the park, with all the borders of the partly newly installed neoliberal / neofascist governments wide open—for NATO forces, that is. Macri has already invited the US to establish several US military bases. In July 2018 Sputnik reported that President Macri has given green light to establish “at least three US bases in the provinces of Neuquén, Misiones and Tierra del Fuego. Their creation would be financed by the US Southern Command.”

And now, in the midst of this man-made—Macri-made—socioeconomic calamity, he invites the G-20 (30 November to 1 December 2018) to feast on Argentina’s goodies, to see for themselves what can be made of an otherwise prosperous country—so that prosperity is ‘shared’ and outsourced to foreign oligarchs, banks and corporations. Wonderful. For that G-20 event, Macri mobilised some 22,000 military forces to guarantee the security of the chiefs of state.

Surely, after the G20 summit, new austerities will be imposed, because everybody sees there is more to be milked from Argentina. They see what they were able to do

to Greece. When common sense would dictate—stop, that’s it, that’s all we can take—there is an opening for even more to be squeezed out of the country. In Argentina there is still a lot of milking to be done. It has just started. If nothing else, the newly Washingtonshoed-in president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, will teach Macri how to do even better for the western money sharks.

In France, the Yellow Vests protests against higher fuel prices and labor reform laws is just a pretext for something much bigger—a growing awakening of the French people, a steadily increasing recognition of how the slippery soft-speaker Emmanuel Macron is stripping France’s populace of most of their civil and social rights, of their labor rights—and ultimately, still to come, of their jobs. A number of ‘false flags’ from Charlie Hebdo to Bataclan to the Nice’s 14th July terror attacks, have helped Macron to put a permanent State of Emergency—basically Martial Law—into the French Constitution. By doing so, he has created a kind of French “Patriot Act”, slice by slice reducing long acquired social rights, transforming them into increased profits for foreign and French corporations and banking giants. Big wonder, Macron is a Rothschild child. He has been put into his position to uphold and expand the Rothschild clan’s banking empire, expanding it way beyond the French borders.

Who are the Yellow Vests—or ‘gilets jaunes’ in French? The name refers to the yellow phosphorescent vests that each and every French driver needs to carry in his vehicle for visibility and protection in case of an incident on the highway. The movement started on 10 October, propagated through facebook against

the Macron imposed increase of fuel taxes. It then expanded rapidly into a movement of discontent with the continuous loss of purchasing power of the common people through budget cuts and soft but steadily increasing austerity imposed on the French citizenry. That, plus the decay of public services, especially in urban peripheries, has transformed the Yellow Vests movement into a vivid protest against Macron, an outright call for Macron’s resignation.

Hundreds of thousands—cumulatively several millions—of Yellow Vests have demonstrated and blocked at times most of Paris during the past two weeks, to reverse the fuel tax increase and to basically regain their social rights and financial purchasing power, increase salaries to at least keep pace with inflation. Diesel prices have already increased in 2018 alone by 23% and gasoline prices by 15%. These prices should increase further by 2019 according to a Macron imposed law.

Can protests in the street remove a President? A President, who came to power with less than 27% of the French eligible voters, a President, who built his power on a movement, called “En Marche” (something like ‘moving on’) which hardly even existed a year before Macron’s ‘election’ in May 2017, an election based on false propaganda, selling heaven to desperate people, who after socialist President François Hollande deceived his country bitterly, leaving his presidency with a popularity rate of less than 10%—these people were ready to accept any ‘populist’ lie in the hope that life would become better.

Well, as usual, the ruling class—almost always the financial elite—took advantage of the desperate situation—and bingo. Macron is

legally in office for 5 years, until 2022. Removing him the ‘democratic way’, through a Parliamentary vote of confidence, is a slim chance, as he has an absolute majority in Parliament, also called the French National Assembly.

So far Macron has been able to impose his ‘austerity’ without the open help of the IMF. But, be sure, with Christine Lagarde at the helm of the IMF, a former French Finance Minister, with close ties to Macron, he most certainly got IMF ‘advice’ on how to continue softly squeezing the juices out of the French people, of their, since the end of WWII, accumulated and hard fought-for social benefits. May be also Greek style?

Curiously, the European Commission and the ECB are much more generous with France than with Italy, when it comes to adhering to the arbitrary 3% deficit limit. Italy was scolded, called to order and asked to submit a revised budget, when deputy PM, Matteo Salvini, presented Italy’s 2019 budget with a 2.9% deficit. France, on the other hand, has been running a deficit above 3% for years, but is gently reminded to please look into its finances a bit more carefully. In other words, the EU is treating brothers and sisters with different yardsticks, thus, helping Macron to do whatever he sees fit to push austerity down the French citizens’ throats. And if they protest, well, we see what’s happening now. There is the State of Emergency that allows the most brutal police crack-down, if needed. And Macron may well need it, if he wants his presidency to survive.

The French people, are, however, special. They prompted the French Revolution in 1789, the legacy of which still reverberates in legal systems around the world. French

students started 40 years ago the 1968 student and workers revolt. It began on the premises of “equal rights and liberty” between men and women. It led to strengthening workers unions and eventually to many workers rights and benefits, precisely those that former President Sarkozy attempted to dismantle and for which Macron was installed to finish the job.

There is a direct relation between what happened in 1968 and what is

Press Release

Open Letter to Senator Bernie Sanders

[On Wednesday, November 28, 2018, over 100 US scholars, intellectuals and activists published the open letter to Senator Bernie Sanders below and invited others to add their names to it.]

Sanders was working to force a new Senate vote on ending, or at least reducing, US participation in the war on Yemen. Signers of the letter below wished to encourage such steps and, in fact, to urge Sanders toward far greater opposition to militarism and support for peace.

*On Tuesday, Senator Sanders had published a new book, *Where We Go from Here: Two Years in the Resistance*. The book contains 38 sections, of which one addresses foreign policy but lays out no concrete proposals. On Tuesday evening Sanders spoke for an hour at George Washington University, aired live on C-Span 2. He discussed a variety of topics, but never mentioned foreign policy—until a questioner asked him for a progressive foreign policy, and Senator Sanders gave a 2-minute response focused on Yemen, for which he received possibly the loudest applause of the evening.*

occurring now. Will the people prevail? Will France set an example for the rest of Europe?

So, what do the people of Argentina and the people of France have in common? They both want to get rid of a despotic president, implanted by the western financial elite to steal the socio-economic coffers of their heritage, and which, if not stopped, may continue throughout the Americas and Europe.

The names of the signatories can be read at: <https://worldbeyondwar.org/bernie>

Text of the Letter:

We write to you as US residents with great respect for your domestic policies.

We support the position of more than 25,000 people who signed a petition during your presidential campaign urging you to take on militarism.

We believe that Dr. King was correct to assert that racism, extreme materialism, and militarism needed to be challenged together rather than separately, and that this remains true.

We believe this is not only practical advice, but a moral imperative, and—not coincidentally—good electoral politics.

During your presidential campaign, you were asked repeatedly how you would pay for human and environmental needs that could be paid for with small fractions of military spending. Your answer was consistently complicated and involved raising taxes. We believe it would be more effective to more often mention the existence

of the military and its price tag. "I would cut 4% of spending on the never-audited Pentagon" is a superior answer in every way to any explanation of any tax plan.

Much of the case that we believe ought to be made is made in a video posted on your Facebook page in early 2018. But it is generally absent from your public comments and policy proposals. Your recent 10-point plan omits any mention of foreign policy whatsoever.

We believe this omission is not just a shortcoming. We believe it renders what does get included incoherent. Military spending is well over 60% of discretionary spending. A public policy that avoids mentioning its existence is not a public policy at all. Should military spending go up or down or remain unchanged? This is the very first question. We are dealing here with an amount of money at least comparable to what could be obtained by taxing the wealthy and corporations (something we are certainly in favor of as well).

A tiny fraction of US military spending could end starvation, the lack of clean water, and various diseases worldwide. No humanitarian policy can avoid the existence of the military. No discussion of free college or clean energy or public transit should omit mention of the place where a trillion dollars a year is going.

War and preparations for war are among the top destroyers, if not the top destroyer, of our natural environment. No environmental policy can ignore them.

Militarism is the top source of the erosion of liberties, and top justification for government secrecy, top creator of refugees, top saboteur of the rule of law, top facilitator of xenophobia and bigotry, and top

reason we are at risk of nuclear apocalypse. There is no area of our social life that is untouched by what Eisenhower called the military industrial complex.

The US public favors cutting military spending.

Even candidate Trump declared the wars since 2001 to have been counterproductive, a statement that appears not to have hurt him on election day.

A December 2014 Gallup poll of 65 nations found the United States to be far and away the country considered the largest threat to peace in the world, and a Pew poll in 2017 found majorities in most countries polled viewing the United States as a threat. A United States responsible for providing clean drinking water, schools, medicine, and solar panels to others would be more secure and face far less hostility around the world; that result would cost a fraction of what is invested in making the United States resented and disliked.

Economists at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst have documented that military spending is an economic drain rather than a jobs program.

We compliment you on your domestic policies. We recognise that the presidential primaries were rigged against you, and we do not wish to advance the baseless idea that you were fairly defeated. We offer our advice in a spirit of friendship. Some of us worked in support of your presidential campaign. Others of us would have worked, and worked hard, for your nomination had you been a candidate for peace.

Sd / -

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France's Yellow Vest Movement Spreads

As the fourth wave of "Yellow Vest" demonstrations erupts across France to protest high living costs and President Emmanuel Macron's anti-working class policies, the movement's influence is spreading across Europe and even the Middle East.

In Belgium, a movement inspired by the "gilets jaunes", or yellow vests has been growing in the last month, as people express their grievances over the cost of living and demand Belgium's center-right coalition government be removed. Their national election is due next May.

Police in Brussels detained more than 400 people Saturday, after demonstrators in yellow vests threw rocks and damaged shops and cars as they attempted to reach the European Union and Belgian government's headquarters.

Riot squads used water cannons and tear gas to keep a crowd, of what police estimate to have been 1,000 people, from reaching the buildings. It is the second instance of violence of this kind in the Belgian capital in eight days.

Inequalities in Europe are deepening and the European Union has increasingly been used to force the application of austerity measures despite high social costs.

Other countries, such as Serbia, Hungary, Spain, Germany, and Iraq,

have also witnessed the movement's influence.

In Iraq, where similar vests had been used as a symbol of unity among protesters in 2015, 100 protesters reportedly stormed Governor Asaad al-Eidani's office in Basra Tuesday to demand access to basic services, like water and electricity.

That same day in Serbia, an opposition member wore the vest in Parliament Tuesday to protest high fuel costs just as France's President Emmanuel Macron delayed his trip to the country amidst unrest back home.

France's so-far leaderless movement began on November 17 to highlight the squeeze on household spending brought about by Macron's fuel taxes. It has since evolved to encompass grievances over social inequalities and what many are calling "fiscal injustice" in France.

After weeks of relentless social protest against the government's fuel tax increase, France's prime minister announced a suspension of the tax in an attempt to demobilize protesters and quell dissent. However, the movement is no longer about motorists and fuel. Now, students, pensioners, workers, and regular citizens are rebelling against an economic model that favors the few over the many.

Courtesy: Telesur

Declare Global Climate Emergency Now!

Modern industrial societies are having a catastrophic effect on the planet, accelerating contamination of the air, water and soil, the destruction of terrestrial and marine ecosystems, mass extinction of species, and runaway climate change. A global economic system fixated with exponential GDP growth at all costs is now not only damaging the natural systems on which we depend, but pushing them towards irreversible breakdown. For all this, our world remains split between obscene wealth and privilege at one end and extreme poverty and exploitation at the other.

Climate change impacts were widely felt in 2018 in the form of unprecedented extreme weather events—heat waves, droughts, floods, hurricanes, etc—on every continent. In the words of UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, humanity is facing nothing less than a “direct existential threat”, a scenario confirmed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s ‘Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C’ released in October 2018. Worryingly, many climate experts have criticised this already grim report for being too conservative and reticent on the actual risks we face.

This alarming situation calls for much more than a change in individual lifestyles. It demands that the world’s governments, corporations and international bodies make climate action their absolute top priority with immediate effect. As an agency mandated with the responsibility of keeping the world a peaceful place for humanity, the United Nations is especially obliged to forestall an imminent and related

danger; that of conflict erupting around the world on account of climate migration.

Therefore, we urge the United Nations to declare a Global Climate Emergency and to follow it up with an emergency action plan formulated in consultation with all stakeholders, especially those most vulnerable to climate impacts. Such a plan must necessarily pursue just, equitable and ecologically sound climate policies, and steer clear of false solutions. As a start, we demand that the United Nations—under whose auspices the COP process is currently being conducted in Katowice, Poland—pressurise nations to commit to far greater emissions reductions than is

the case presently.

This is essential to bridge the gap between the extremely alarming scenario outlined by the UN’s own authoritative scientific research and the vastly inadequate and ineffective actions being presently taken in response to it. By doing so, the United Nations would only be doing the least that is rationally, ethically and politically expected of a body that is a collective of the earth’s nations and its peoples.

Petition drafted by Citizens’ Campaign on the Climate Crisis, India. Please sign the petition at:

<https://www.ipetitions.com/petition/call-it-by-its-true-name-declare-global-climate/>

BJP’s Use of Dates to Undermine Ambedkar

Ravikiran Shinde

Millions of Dalits across the country will pay homage to Dr B.R. Ambedkar on his death anniversary on December 6. Many will travel to Chaityabhoomi in Mumbai, where his last rites were performed

Only two weeks separate November 26 and December 6. But the difference couldn’t be sharper. The former denotes Constitution Day, an anniversary of adaptation of the India’s Constitution. The latter the destruction of the very foundation of it by the BJP, Shiv Sena and the Sangh parivar.

Dates are important as they reveal historical events. But according to memory grandmaster James Ponder, if you want to memorise dates and events, it needs to be associated with an individual image or information

that you can recall well.

December 6 and Babri mosque

Today, how do we remember December 6? We remember it more as the anniversary of Babri masjid’s demolition than as the death anniversary of Ambedkar. That is because BJP and its allies chose December 6 to demolish Babri masjid in a systematically executed conspiracy that proved to be one of the biggest blots on our democracy.

Seeds of anti-Muslim sentiment were sown for political purpose during the Ram mandir agitation. Since 1992, TV images of people wielding iron rods atop Babri mosque further reinforced the date in our mind.

By erasing the mosque, BJP

achieved two objectives on the same day. While it symbolically tried to demolish the Constitution by disregarding law and order, it chose Ambedkar's death anniversary to do it.

Every year since 1992, the Sangh parivar celebrates December 6 as *shourya diwas or vijay diwas*, suggesting that it was no coincidence. The VHP, which celebrated the event nationally in 2017, calls it a moment of glory, honour and courage. This year too, the Bajarang Dal and the VHP have planned *shourya diwas* celebrations.

Clearly, the Sangh parivar chose December 6 to demolish Babri not despite the relevance of the date, but because of it.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi leaves no opportunity to invoke Ambedkar, especially during the elections. In his *Man ki Baat* radio speech on November 26, Modi mentioned that Ambedkar's *mahaparinirvan diwas* (death anniversary) was on December 6. But who will forget that Modi was part of the rath yatra, led by L.K. Advani, that concluded in the destruction of the mosque on this day?

Even as the prime minister, Modi has never reined in any of the BJP ministers or MLAs who talk against the Constitution.

Clearly, the BJP is playing "good cop-bad cop" to hoodwink the people.

Union minister Ananth Hegde had publicly said last year that the BJP was here to change the Constitution, but he was not sacked.

Dharma Sansad and Shourya Diwas

This year, as important assembly elections in MP, Mizoram, Telangana

and Rajasthan loomed, the VHP organised a dharma sansad on November 25. It calls this the 'last effort' to clear the hurdles in the construction of a Ram temple. Many BJP leaders attended the event.

BJP MLA from UP Surendra Singh once again warned that the sansad would break the law and go against the Constitution (on the eve of the Constitution Day).

Last year, the event was organised on November 24, 25 and 26 in Udupi, Karnataka, to deliberately overlap with the Constitution Day. Notice the use of sansad. The move from sansad (Lok Sabha) to dharma sansad is importantly worded. The suggested 'hurdle' in the way of the Ram temple is the Constitution.

How the BJP uses dates for its programs

Since it has come to power, the BJP has tried to associate dates with its own leaders and agenda – whether its good governance day (December 25) on A.B. Vajpayee's birthday or inaugurating the statue of Sardar Patel on Indira Gandhi's death anniversary (October 31). The BJP is leaving its mark on all important dates. Even Vajpayee, as prime minister, chose the birth anniversary of Gautam Buddha to carry out a nuclear test on November 11, 1998. The media obliged by saying, "And the Buddha smiled"

The BJP's opposition to the Constitution

The BJP and the Sangh parivar have been opposed to the very idea of our constitution. As the Constitution was finalised in November 1949, the RSS's mouthpiece Organiser (November 30, 1949) read:

The worst about the new

constitution of Bharat is that there is nothing Bhartiya about it. . . . There is no trace of ancient Bhartiya constitutional laws. . . . Manu's Laws were written long before . . . To this day his laws as enunciated in the Manusmriti excite the admiration of the world and elicit spontaneous obedience and conformity. But to our constitutional pundits that means nothing.

This was a direct attack on Ambedkar and the Constitution. It is important to note that Ambedkar had publicly burned the Manusmriti text many years earlier, before drafting the constitution. In the Constitution, he ensured that it was erased legally as well.

The BJP has tried to change the fundamentals of the Constitution many times. In fact, Vajpayee had formed a Constitution review committee to alter it.

The Sangh parivar detests the Constitution and Ambedkar. So much so that, they go to the extent of celebrating a day on which millions mourn and pay homage to him.

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Rahul Gandhi's 'Hinduism on Display' and RSS-BJP's Hindutva

Ram Puniyani

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the father of the nation, did say that he is a Hindu; at the same time he went on to say that religion is a private matter for him. His greatest disciple Jawaharlal Nehru was a rationalist agnostic. He laid the foundations of secular India where the matters related to religion were supposed to be dealt with at social or personal level. Nearly six decades after the death of the first Prime Minister of India, matters have drifted beyond imagination. Nehru's great grandson who began his political career with no signs of public display of religion, today is making a clear public display of his religiosity. Apart from stating that he is a *janeudhari* (wearing sacred thread), *Shiv Bhakt* to visiting temples by the dozen, he also took the pilgrimage to Mansarovar. The Congress' Madhya Pradesh unit took out a "Ram Van Gaman Pad yatra" and is promising a *gaushala* (cow shed) in each panchayat. BJP spokespersons are questioning all these moves as if their monopoly in such matters is under threat.

The result is that there are critics labeling Congress politics as being soft Hindutva. These signs of the party of Gandhi and Nehru are disturbing at one level. Still, does it mean that the Congress is abandoning the path of secularism, the path outlined in our Constitution, of religion being a matter of people's personal choices to be dealt with by individuals—communities on their own? Is Congress trying to walk the path which RSS-BJP have pursued to gain power, the path of political

polarization of communities along religious lines, the path of divisive politics, the path of abandoning material issues while creating the haze of emotive ones like Ram Temple and Holy cow-beef?

After its defeat in the 2014 general elections, the A.K. Anthony Committee set up by the Congress gave the report that an important cause of defeat of the Congress was the popular perception that people looked upon it as a pro-Muslim party, which by implication meant that it was being regarded as being an anti-Hindu outfit. This came in the background of the tireless propaganda from the RSS-BJP stable that the Congress has been appeasing Muslims, Congress is pro-Muslim, etc. This propaganda has been mixed up with the lie that Jawaharlal Nehru was the descendant of a Muslim and that the Congress is not interested in taking care of interests of Hindus, and so on and so forth. The argument was also put forward that the Hindu BJP is on one side and godless secularists are on the other side.

If we want to go to the roots of this false propaganda, we will have to go back to many decades ago. When the Indian National Congress was formed, it represented rising India; this umbrella organisation of all Indians had members from all the communities of India. This got manifested in people like Pherozshah Mehta, Badruddin Tyabaji becoming its initial presidents. Right from that time, communal elements, who were the progenitors of future Hindu

Mahasabha-RSS ideology and who represented the interests of the Hindu landlords, started saying that the Congress is appeasing Muslims. After its founding, the RSS continued with this propaganda; it was the Hindu Mahasabha-RSS propaganda against the leaders of the Congress, especially Mahatma Gandhi, as being pro-Muslim that created the hatred that led Godse to kill the father of the Nation. Following the winning of independence, in keeping with the spirit of democracy, special policies were initiated to support the minorities, such as that they were permitted to have their own educational institutions. This along with Haj subsidy, which as such was a subsidy to Air India, acted as a potent weapon in the hands of the RSS parivar to propagate the falsehood of appeasement of minorities. This malicious propaganda got a further boost when the Congress, in a grave mistake, overturned the verdict of Supreme Court in the matter of Shah Bano and got the Parliament to pass the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986. This opened the flood gates for the propaganda that 'appeasement of Muslims' was being done by the Congress. This was a grave error of judgment, mostly forced by protests by the conservative Muslim elements against the Shah Bano judgment.

This has not been the only flaw in the Congress stand on secularism. It failed to take decisive and firm action in controlling riots and the accusations made by secular activists that the Congress has often acted in a

biased manner against Muslims and Sikhs are correct. The Congress role in opening the gates of Babri mosque was another important political blunder, and it eventually led to the demolition of Babri Mosque, to which the Congress leadership remained a mute spectator. Clearly, its secularism had holes which could not halt the march of Hindutva and Hindu nationalism. It created the grounds for the rise of the RSS. Today, the Hindutva forces have become strong enough for the political discourse to be dictated by their politics, the politics of the RSS–BJP. Not only Congress, even Mamata Bannerjee has lately shown the tilt towards displaying such religiosity by sanctioning subsidised electricity for Durga Puja pandals and participating in the Ram Navami festival.

So, the question arises, can the policies being pursued by Rahul Gandhi led Congress be termed as soft Hindutva? I would like to answer, definitely no. The unwanted tilt in display of religiosity is basically an attempt to undo the perception that has been created by the RSS–BJP of the Congress being pro-Muslim and undo the image of being godless secularists. Hindutva politics is based on Brahmanical hierarchy of caste and gender; it aims to gradually do away with secular democracy and bring in Hindu Rashtra. To combat this, what is needed is adoption of inclusive concept of Gandhi's Hinduism, where values of pluralism and diversity have bigger importance. It is surely a sign of regressive times where Hindu nationalist discourse is overtaking the better of Indian nationalist ethos.

The RSS Parivar has been successful in setting the terms

of debate, confining it to 'Hindu RSS–BJP' versus 'pro Muslim, godless secularists'. The display of religiosity by the Congress is a reaction to this debate, but it actually means succumbing to the frame of debate set by the RSS–BJP. The real way it can be countered is by taking up the issues of the marginalised sections of the people, the majority of

whom are Hindus, like the farmers, the oppressed castes and the victims of patriarchy, the women. The Congress took up the role of leading the freedom movement against British rule in yesteryears. It needs to assume a similar role in freeing the nation from the caste hierarchy, communalism and patriarchy now.

Email: ram.puniyani@gmail.com

Central Government Ensnarers Itself in Northeast and Kashmir

Sandeep Pandey

First the Bhartiya Janata Party led government in Delhi was very enthusiastic about conducting the National Register of Citizens exercise in Assam on the premise that this process will identify all the illegal migrants from Bangladesh who entered Assam after 24 March, 1971, the date of creation of Bangladesh, who could then be sent back to Bangladesh. The assumption was that most of these illegal immigrants would be Muslims. However, the government developed cold feet after it realised that among the 40.07 lakh people who have been left out of NRC, the majority are not Muslims but Hindus. Now it is trying to push the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill which will allow non-Muslim citizens from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan who arrived in India on or before December 31, 2014 to acquire Indian citizenship easily. This Bill is facing stiff opposition from the Assamese society. Akhil Gogoi, leader of Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti, along with 70 other organisations, has launched a frontal attack on the government. What

the BJP central leadership doesn't realise is that Assamese society is not divided on communal lines like in Gujarat, Maharashtra or parts of the Hindi speaking heartland. For the Assamese people, the bigger fear is linguistic and cultural domination by Bengalis. Assamese society itself is a product of assimilation of locals with outsiders from diverse backgrounds. The Assamese are not a homogenous community. But they clearly make a distinction between people who came before 1971 and those who came afterwards. Assamese nationality is as assertive as Tamil or Bengali nationality, and has a distinct identity.

Meanwhile, in Assam itself, the All Bodo Students' Association under the leadership of Pramod Boro is demanding a separate statehood for Bodoland. After a long struggle, the Bodoland Territorial Council was created in 2003 comprising four districts of Chirang, Buxa, Kokrajhar and Udlagiri. Out of 40 government departments, all except Home and Finance were transferred to BTC by the Assam government. However, the Assam government continues

to maintain its stranglehold on BTC as all resolutions passed by BTC are subject to final approval of the Assam assembly, which is against the spirit of Schedule VI of Constitution as a part of which the BTC was created. So far, except for one out of 28, all Bills passed by BTC have been stuck at the Assam assembly level. Even though the population living in the above mentioned four districts is 12% of the population of Assam, only 2% of the state budget is allocated to BTC. Schools are being starved of teachers and textbooks in Bodo language. Same is the situation with other departments. Rampant corruption prevents whatever little benefits can reach people. Hence Bodo people are now disillusioned and feel that only as a separate state can they prosper. In recent talks with the Home minister, it is believed that Indian government has offered a Union Territory status to Bodoland but that is not acceptable to the Bodos.

In neighbouring Nagaland, the popular demand is for autonomy. Peace talks have been going on between the Government of India and various Naga groups for the last 21 years without any resolution. The latest rounds of talks with the Modi government seem to have reached some conclusion. But Naga people are very clear that they want a separate Constitution and a separate flag. They see themselves living not under the Indian Constitution but in peaceful coexistence with India. The Nagas have never considered themselves to be part of India. They feel they were first divided among two countries—India and Myanmar—by the British, and then by India into different states like Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh,

Manipur, Assam and Mizoram. They aspire for a separate sovereign identity.

However, the experience of Kashmiris with a separate Constitution has not been very good. All the promises made by the Government of India at the time of signing of the Instrument of Accession by Maharaja Hari Singh have been violated. The separate flag is still there but it doesn't have the sanctity the flag of a sovereign state should have. It is difficult to even obtain a copy of the Jammu and Kashmir Constitution now. Articles 370 and 35A of Indian Constitution which grant a special status to J&K are there only for namesake. Famous Kashmiri poet and writer Zareef Ahmad Zareef described it as a lock on a door to a room which doesn't have anything inside. People of Kashmir feel cheated by the the Government of India (GoI). According to the initial agreement, except for Defence, Communications and Foreign Affairs, in all other matters sovereignty was supposed to rest with the state government. The use of pellet guns on people of Kashmir was the ultimate inhuman treatment meted out to them. It is unthinkable that GoI could have used these pellet guns on an unruly crowd anywhere else in the country. It is an example of the step-motherly treatment meted out to people of J&K. People pelting stones at security forces were accused by GoI of having accepted money from Pakistan. There can be nothing more ridiculous than this. This is admitting the fact that Pakistan is able to control each and every individual in Kashmir. If that is so, the question arises, what are the security forces and intelligence agencies then doing? And if religion

is the basis on which Pakistan has been able to steer people towards its side, why isn't India able to convince people of Nepal of its point of view. It is an open fact that Nepalese people harbour an anti-India feeling, especially after India blockaded supplies to Nepal when Nepal refused to bow to the Indian wish of making amendments in their new Constitution to favour the pro-India Madhesi people. During the Modi regime, the situation has worsened in J&K. Even people who had moved closer to accepting integration with India from a previous position of autonomy are now finding it difficult to accept Indian hegemony. The GoI has hurt the sentiments of people of Kashmir beyond repair.

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GMO Potato Creator Now Fears its Impact on Human Health

Ken Roseboro

Of all the genetic engineers who have renounced the technology—Arpad Pusztai, Belinda Martineau, Thierry Vrain and John Fagan, among others—because of its shortsighted approach and ability to produce unintended and potentially toxic consequences, Caius Rommens' story may be the most compelling.

Rommens was director of research at Simplot Plant Sciences from 2000 to 2013 where he led development of the company's genetically engineered Innate potato. But over time, Rommens started to have serious doubts about his work and worried about potential health risks from eating the GMO potatoes, which are now sold in 4,000 supermarkets in the US.

Rommens' concerns about GMO potato led him to write a book, Pandora's Potatoes, which was recently published. The book is a case study on how a scientist's initial enthusiasm about genetic engineering turns to doubt and fear as he realises the hazards the technology can create.

I recently interviewed Caius Rommens about his work on developing the GMO potato and the misgivings he now has about it.

Please describe your work developing GMO potatoes and your position at Simplot.

Caius Rommens: I left my position as team leader at Monsanto to start an independent biotech effort at Simplot. During the 12 years I worked there, I designed a genetically modified potato that I

believed was resistant to bruise and late blight, and that could be used to produce French fries that were less coloured and less carcinogenic than normal fries.

The main genetic engineering of the Simplot GMO potatoes was silencing genes called RNAi. What are some of the possible negative consequences of silencing genes?

CR: Silencing is not gene-specific. Any gene with a similar structure to the silencing construct may be silenced as well. It is even possible that the silencing that takes place inside the GM potatoes affects the genes of animals eating these GM potatoes. I am most concerned about bees that don't eat GM potatoes but may use GM potato pollen to feed their larvae. Based on my assessment of the literature, it appears that the silencing constructs are active in pollen.

You say that silencing the PPO (polyphenol oxidase, a gene responsible for browning in potatoes) gene increases toxins that accumulate in the GMO potatoes. Why are these toxins produced and what effects could these toxins produce on human health?

CR: Ex-colleagues of mine had shown that PPO-silencing increases the levels of alpha-amino adipate by about six-fold. Alpha-amino adipate is a neurotoxin, and it can also react with sugars to produce advanced glycoxidation products implicated in a variety of diseases.

(A Monsanto GM corn variety, LY038, was found to have high concentrations of alpha-

amino adipate, and an application for its approval in Europe in 2009 was withdrawn after regulators raised safety questions.)

There is no data on the actual levels of alpha-amino adipate in GM potatoes, but I believe that Simplot should carefully determine these levels.

Similarly, ex-colleagues had shown that the damaged and bruised tissues of potatoes may accumulate high levels of tyramine, another toxin. Such damaged tissues are normally identified and trimmed, but they are concealed, or partially concealed, and much of it is not trimmed in GM potatoes. Therefore, it seems important that Simplot should determine the full spectrum of possible tyramine levels in their GM potatoes.

Another potential toxin is chaconine-malonyl. There is little known about this compound, but ex-colleagues had shown that it is increased by almost 200 percent upon PPO-silencing. This should be investigated.

In your book you write that the GMO potatoes don't eliminate bruising but just conceal it. Please explain.

CR: PPO-silencing prevents the darkening of bruises. The suppression of symptoms is so effective that we believed we had overcome the bruise issue. It took me a lot of time to understand that GM potatoes still have bruises—invisible bruises—that are just as damaged as the darkening bruises of normal potatoes. In other words,

the invisible bruises still are entry points for pathogens and exit points for water, which are two important issues during storage.

In addition to the claim of eliminating bruises, Simplot says the Innate potato provides “protection against late blight pathogen,” and “reduced asparagine, which contributes to reduced acrylamide in cooked potatoes.” What are your reactions to these claims?

CR: The GM potato does contain a resistance gene that provides protection against late blight. The problem is that nobody knows how long the protection will last. Plant breeders have tested many different resistance genes in the past, and these genes are almost always overcome by quickly evolving pathogens.

Another issue is that late blight is usually accompanied by other pathogens. In humid regions of the world where late blight is most active, there are dozens of other pathogens. So, growing GM potatoes with a single resistance gene in, for example, Bangladesh is like getting vaccinated for one tropical disease and then moving to the tropics where there are many other diseases.

Next, the reduced asparagine levels do lower the amount of acrylamide in French fries, but these levels are already very low in normal fries. Simplot argues that the reduced acrylamide levels reduce carcinogenicity, but I could not find any reliable studies demonstrating that normal fries are carcinogenic.

The title of your book is *Pandora’s Potatoes*. What led you to choose this title?

CR: During the five years after my departure from Simplot, I realised

that I had not been rigorous enough in considering the possibility that my modifications might have caused unintended effects. I then studied the publicly available literature that was relevant to my past work, and identified a number of issues that had been hidden from my view. My GM potatoes had “hidden” issues—like Pandora’s Box.

What do you think should be done with these GMO potatoes?

CR: I believe that, for the short term, GM potatoes entering the consumer market should be evaluated for the incidence of hidden bruise and infections and the range in levels of toxins such as alpha-amino acid and tyramine.

Do you think the problems you experienced in GMO potatoes will be similar in other GMO plants?

CR: It is my experience that genetic engineers are biased and narrow-minded. They may not be able to critically assess their own creations.

What is your perspective on genetic engineering now after your work with the GMO potato and misgivings about it?

CR: My concern about genetic engineering is that the absence of unintentional effects can never be guaranteed. It may take dozens of years before these effects reveal themselves, and we should be extremely cautious applying the technology.

What is your perspective on CRISPR/gene editing?

CR: The problem with CRISPR is that it changes the function of a gene in all tissues of an organism. This is a very important limitation,

because gene changes are mostly “useful” only if implemented in a single tissue.

CRISPR has the same problems as genetic engineering. In my book, I explain that it requires manipulations in tissue culture that cause mutations. These mutations have a negative effect on crop performance and cannot be removed from certain crops including apple and potato.

What do you see as the best alternatives to GMO or conventional mono-cropped potatoes?

CR: Genetic engineering is meant to increase crop uniformity. I believe the opposite approach—to increase crop diversity—will be more effective in increasing the sustainability of farming.

I am most hopeful in the efforts of small companies such as Solynta (a Dutch company that has developed an innovative non-GMO technology for targeted breeding of potatoes). The main benefit of Solynta’s approach is that it breeds potatoes that have a simpler genetic structure than cultivated potatoes—more like that of wild potatoes—so that genetic traits can be combined much more effectively.

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Vilifying the Intelligentsia

Prabhat Patnaik

Narendra Modi said the other day, rather disparagingly, that the “Urban Naxals” live in air-conditioned comfort. Since all who speak or write in public upholding the right to dissent from the Hindutva positions, including even known critics of the Left, which means virtually all members of the intelligentsia who display any integrity, have been dubbed “Urban Naxals” by his government, his remark in effect amounts to targeting the entire intelligentsia.

His remark constitutes an utterly crude attempt to delegitimise any intellectual position that is unpalatable for the government, by suggesting that those who hold such positions live in comfort and hence should not be taken seriously by the people, i.e., the very fact of their living in comfort itself makes their arguments false as far as the people are concerned.

His statement is absurd for at least three reasons. First, most of the people arrested in the last few months as “Urban Naxals” have been civil rights activists working among tribal and other marginalised people and living with them under considerable hardship, as authentic activists of all descriptions including Left political activists generally do; their actual living conditions are thus far removed from Modi’s picture of air-conditioned comfort. Secondly, Modi himself and his friends in big business and media, whose pronouncements he would no doubt want people to take seriously as constituting the “truth”, do not exactly live in

penury; indeed they live in greater air-conditioned comfort than anyone else in the country. (One of them even has a notorious high-rise residence in Mumbai entirely for himself). Thirdly and most pertinently, the validity or otherwise of an intellectual position has to be established intellectually, and not just by looking at the life-style of the person holding such a position. Indeed when the life-style of the person holding a particular position is invoked to negate that position, then we can be sure that underlying such invoking is an inability to confront it intellectually.

But this habit of trying to negate intellectual positions by simply running down in the eyes of the people the persons holding these positions, characterises all the right-wing movements (which are sometimes misleadingly called “populist”) that are coming up all over the world. All of them negate intellectual positions unpalatable to them, not through arguments, but by debunking in various ways the set of intellectuals who advance such positions. But since they themselves do not have many intellectuals worth the name, for if they did, then they would confront criticism through arguments rather than through mere debunking, their debunking of intellectuals who are not with them amounts in effect to running down all intellectuals: all intellectuals are perceived by them to be actual or potential threats in varying degrees. In short they oppose the very activity of intellection.

There is nothing surprising about

why such right-wing groups do not have any intellectuals worth the name. Intellection requires asking questions, and a hallmark of all such groups committed to bigotry in one form or another is that the members of the group are expected to swallow unquestioningly what is given to them from the top by the “leader”. This does not necessarily mean that they actually do not ask questions. Many of them of course do not, but others, one presumes, do; but those who do keep that fact carefully camouflaged, whether out of fear or out of mere opportunism or out of careerist considerations.

The upshot however is that intellectual activity within such groups takes the form of simply propagating a set of thoughts handed down, thoughts which are then commonly articulated by everyone in the group. It does not take the form of any independent engagement by its members with ideas or issues.

In situations where a right-wing movement comes up all of a sudden and rapidly springs to prominence, it may succeed in enlisting the support of some already established prominent intellectual, and thereby claim some intellectual pedigree; but even in such a case it is a question of the movement’s co-existence for convenience with some intellectuals and not of any intellectual activity within the movement itself. On the other hand, in old and well-established movements, like the Hindutva movement, the scope for even such arrangements of convenience scarcely exists. Since the ideas are handed down from

the founder through the leaders who have followed, even claiming borrowed intellectual pedigree becomes too risky, lest it create confusion among the ranks owing to some lack of synchrony between the ideas of the intellectual “owned” for convenience and the handed-down ideas of the leaders.

Such movements therefore are intrinsically and essentially anti-intellectual, not just anti-Left but opposed to any form of independent intellection; and hence they are opposed to education per se, which by its very nature constitutes an activity that demands intellection in the quest for knowledge.

There is a fundamental difference here between the Left and the Right. The Left traditionally has been supportive of ideas in general, of the quest for knowledge in general. It has no doubt been supportive in this sense in the belief that within such an ambience Left-wing ideas will flourish because of their intellectual worth, but that is irrelevant. The point is that it has been supportive. Many Left activists in India for example have helped to build schools and colleges, not with the narrow objective of propagating Left ideas (in the way that the RSS uses schools to propagate RSS ideas), but for simply promoting thinking, for promoting a quest for knowledge in society. These institutions have not been Party institutions in any sense, or institutions controlled by the particular Party activists who founded them; on the contrary, those who founded them have tended to move on with their work, having planted this tiny seed for the society’s future.

The Right on the other hand has a totally different perspective, which

is manifested in the fact that one of the most enduring legacies of the present BJP government, for which it will be long remembered, is the havoc it has wrought on the system of education, especially the system of higher education, in the country. This has not been a matter of ham-handedness of a particular minister; or of shoddy treatment meted out to a particular institution; or of simply one group of persons, associated with running educational institutions earlier in the pre-BJP period, being replaced by another group of persons acceptable to the BJP, who happen to be less able or less experienced or less academically-minded. The damage has been systematic, pervasive, and caused not by some sociological difference between one set of administrators and another, but by the structural fact that Hindutva bigotry cannot afford to stand any scrutiny of itself, and hence cannot stand any vibrant institution of higher education, since the very *raison d’être* of such an institution is to scrutinise everything.

Hindutva can acquire hegemony only by killing thought per se. Its opposition to intellectual activity that is critical of itself must necessarily get transformed into an opposition to intellectual activity as such.

But it is not enough that the tribe of intellectuals be victimised officially. If they command respect in society, then such victimisation can boomerang on the ruling Party by creating sympathy for them among the people. The victimisation of intellectuals must be accompanied therefore by a vilification of intellectuals, so that they lose their moral standing among the people.

The people must be made to see them as “the other”. Epithets like

“Urban Naxals”, “anti-national” elements, an immoral “English-speaking crowd”, a group wallowing in “air-conditioned luxury”, become essential for this purpose. Along with the Muslims, the Dalits, the marginalised groups, the intellectuals too must be made aliens as far as the people are concerned.

This becomes particularly important in a society where intellectuals traditionally have been held in high esteem among the people, a legacy of our caste-based feudal past (even though the intellectuals of yore would have been a very different lot from the intellectuals of a post-colonial society who still bear the marks of being the product of an anti-colonial struggle). It is ironical that a Party like the BJP that upholds essential aspects of our feudal past like the caste system (which is central to all orthodox Hinduism and therefore permeates the Hindutva project) should be striving so vigorously to destroy an important legacy of that past, namely the esteem for intellectuals or persons engaged in mental labour.

It is also not surprising that it is doing so by attributing to them “capitalist vices” like living in air-conditioned comfort. The irony again, however, consists in the fact that this is being done by a government that claims as its most important plus-point its ability to usher in rapid capitalist development, even to the extent of opening the economy to the unfettered operation of international capital. But this irony is inherent in the logic of contemporary neoliberal capitalism.

Anniversaries That Never Will Be

Tom Engelhardt

We're already two years past the crystal anniversary and eight years short of the silver one, or at least we would be, had it been a wedding—and, after a fashion, perhaps it was. On October 7, 2001, George W. Bush launched the invasion—"liberation" was the word often used then—of Afghanistan. It was the start of the second Afghan War of the era, one that, all these years later, still shows no signs of ending. Though few realised it at the time, the American people married war. Permanent, generational, infinite war is now embedded in the American way of life, while just about the only part of the government guaranteed ever more soaring dollars, no matter what it does with them, is the US military.

This October 7th marked the 17th anniversary of that first of so many still-spreading conflicts. In league with various Afghan warlords, the US military began moving into that country, while its Air Force launched a fierce campaign, dropping large numbers of precision munitions and hundreds of cluster bombs. Those were meant not just for al-Qaeda, the terror outfit that, the previous month, had dispatched its own precision air force—hijacked American commercial jets—to take out iconic buildings in New York and Washington, but the Taliban, a fundamentalist sect that then controlled most of the country. By early 2002, that movement had been ejected from its last provincial capital, while Osama bin Laden had fled into hiding in Pakistan. And so it began.

The 17th anniversary of that

invasion passed in the heated aftermath of the Kavanaugh hearings, as the president was rallying his base by endlessly bashing the Democrats as an "angry mob" promoting "mob rule." So if you weren't then thinking about Afghanistan, don't blame yourself. You were in good company.

On October 8th, for instance, the front page of my hometown newspaper had headlines like "Court Showdown Invigorates G.O.P. in Crucial Races" and "20 Dead Upstate as Limo Crashes on Way to Party." If you were old like me and still reading the paper version of the New York Times, you would have had to make your way to page seven to find out that such an anniversary had even occurred. There, a modest-sized article, headlined "On 17th Anniversary of US Invasion, 54 Are Killed Across Afghanistan," began this way:

"Kabul, Afghanistan—At least 54 people have been killed across Afghanistan in the past 24 hours, according to a tally based on interviews with officials on Sunday—17 years to the day [after] American forces invaded the country to topple the Taliban regime. The violence was a reminder that the war has only raged deadlier with time, taking a toll on both the Afghan security forces and the civilians caught in the crossfire."

And that, really, was that. Little other mention anywhere and no follow-up. No significant commentary or major op-eds. No memorials or ceremonies. No thoughts from Congress. No

acknowledgement from the White House.

Yes, 3,546 American and NATO troops had died in those long years (including seven Americans so far in 2018). There have also been Afghan deaths aplenty, certainly tens of thousands of them in a country where significant numbers of people are regularly uprooted and displaced from their homes and lives. And 17 years later, the Taliban controls more of the country than at any moment since 2002; the US-backed Afghan security forces are reportedly taking casualties that may, over the long run, prove unsustainable; provincial capitals have been briefly seized by insurgent forces; civilian deaths, especially of women and children, are at their highest levels in years (as are US and Afghan air strikes); al-Qaeda has grown and spread across significant parts of the Middle East and Africa; a bunch of other terror outfits, including ISIS, are now in Afghanistan; and ISIS, like al-Qaeda (of which it was originally an offshoot), has also franchised itself globally.

In other words, 17 years later, what was once known as the Global War on Terror and is now a set of conflicts that no one here even bothers to name has only grown worse. Meanwhile, the military that American presidents repeatedly hailed as the greatest fighting force in history continues to battle fruitlessly across a vast swath of the planet. Afghanistan, of course, remains America's "longest war," as articles regularly acknowledged some years ago. These days, however,

it has become so eternal that it has evidently outgrown the label “longest.”

(Un)Happy Anniversary indeed!

Wedded to War

If you consider this the anniversary of a marriage made in hell, then you would also have to think of the war on terror that started in Afghanistan as having had a brood of demon children—the invasion of Iraq being the first of them—and by now possibly even grandchildren. Meanwhile, the first actual American children born after the 9/11 attacks can now join the US military and go fight in . . . well, Afghanistan, where about 14,000 American military personnel, possibly tens of thousands of private contractors, and air power galore (as well as the CIA’s drones) remain active indeed.

And keep in mind that Americans aren’t the only people wedded to war in the twenty-first century. However, when it comes to the others I have in mind, it’s not a matter of anniversaries ignored, but anniversaries that will never be. Let’s start with a recent barely reported incident in Afghanistan. On October 5th, either the US Air Force or the Afghan one that has been armed, trained, and supported by the US military destroyed part of a “wedding procession” in Kandahar Province, reportedly killing four and wounding eight, including women and children. (By the way, on the day of the 17th anniversary of the war, an Afghan air strike reportedly killed 10 children.) We don’t know—and probably never will—which air force was responsible, nor do we know if the bride or groom survived, no less whether they will marry and someday celebrate their 17th anniversary.

All we know and probably will

ever know is that, in the melee that is still Afghanistan, the obliteration of that wedding procession was just one more scarcely noted, remarkably repetitive little nightmare to which Americans will pay no attention whatsoever. Admittedly, when directly asked by pollsters 17 years later, a near majority of them (49%) do think that US goals still remain unmet in that country and, according to other recent polls, somewhere between 61% and 69% of Americans would support the withdrawal of all US forces there. That, however, is anything but a stunning figure given that, in 2011, a Washington Post–ABC News poll indicated that two-thirds of Americans believed the Afghan war “no longer worth fighting.” Evidently it’s now simply no longer worth giving a moment’s thought to.

Essentially unnoticed here, the destruction of wedding parties by US air power has, in fact, been a relative commonplace in these years of endless war across the Greater Middle East. The first time American air power obliterated a wedding in Afghanistan was in late December 2001. US B-52 and B-1B bombers mistakenly took out much of a village in Paktia Province killing more than 100 civilians while wedding festivities were underway, an event barely noted in the American media. We do not know if the bride and groom survived. (Imagine, however, the non-stop media attention if a terrorist had attacked a wedding in this country and killed anyone, no less the bride or groom!)

The second incident we know of took place in Khost Province in Eastern Afghanistan in May 2002 while a wedding was underway and villagers were firing in the air, a form of celebration there. At least 10 people died and many more

were wounded. The third occurred that July in Oruzgan Province when the US Air Force dropped seven 2,000-pound bombs on a wedding party, again evidently after celebratory firing had taken place, wiping out unknown numbers of villagers including, reportedly, a family of 25 people. In July 2008, a missile from a US plane took out a party escorting a bride to the groom’s house in Nuristan Province, killing at least 47 civilians, 39 of them women and children, including the bride. The next month in Laghman Province, American bombers killed 16 Afghans in a house, including 12 members of a family hosting a wedding. In June 2012, in Logar Province, another wedding party was obliterated, 18 people dying (half of them children). This was the only one of these slaughters for which the US military offered an apology.

And that’s just what I happen to know about wedding parties in Afghanistan in these years. Don’t forget Iraq either, where in May 2004 US jets attacked a village near the Syrian border filled with people sleeping after a wedding ceremony, killing at least 42 of them, including “27 members of the [family hosting the wedding ceremony], their wedding guests, and even the band of musicians hired to play at the ceremony.” Of that attack, the man who was then commander of the US 1st Marine Division and is now secretary of defense, James “Mad Dog” Mattis, said dismissively, “How many people go to the middle of the desert . . . to hold a wedding 80 miles from the nearest civilisation?”

And don’t forget the 15 or so Yemenis on the way to a wedding in December 2013 who were “mistaken for an al-Qaeda convoy” and taken out by a US drone. As I’ve written elsewhere, since September 11,

2001, we've been number one . . . in obliterating wedding parties. Still, we've had some genuine competition in recent years—above all, the Saudis in their brutal American-backed and -supplied air war in Yemen. From an incident in September 2015 in which their missiles killed more than 130 Yemenis at a wedding reception (including the usual women and children) to a strike on a wedding in April of this year that took out the groom, they've run a close second to the US. And then there's ISIS, which, from Afghanistan to Turkey, seems to have a knack of its own for sending its version of a precision air force (suicide bombers) to take out weddings.

All of these, of course, represent anniversaries that will never be, which couldn't be sadder. In truth, if you live in any of the battle zones of the still-expanding war on terror, you should probably think twice about getting married or at least having a wedding ceremony. Since Americans don't focus on such moments in our never-ending conflicts, they have no way of seeing them as the heart and soul of the twenty-first-century American way of war. And of course there's always the question that General Mattis raised to take into account: What are you going to do with people who insist on getting married in the desert—other than slaughter them?

Afghan Previews?

Only days after the 9/11 attacks, every member of Congress but one voted in favor of the Bush administration's authorisation of military force that opened the way not just for the Afghan invasion, but so much else that followed. The sole no vote came from Representative Barbara Lee (D-CA), who warned that "a rush to launch precipitous

military counterattacks runs too great a risk that more innocent men, women, children will be killed." How right she proved to be.

By now, there is the equivalent of unending "towers" of dead women and children in the Greater Middle East, while millions of Afghans and others have been displaced from their homes and record millions more sent fleeing across national boundaries as refugees. That, in turn, has helped fuel the "populist" right in both Europe and the US, so in a sense, Donald Trump might be said to be one result of the invasion of Afghanistan—of, that is, a twenty-first-century American push to unsettle the world. Who knows what else (and who else) America's wars may produce before they end, as they will someday?

Here, however, is one possibility that, at this point, isn't part of any thinking in this country but perhaps should be. In the wake of America's first Afghan War (1979-1989), the Red Army, the stymied

military forces of the other Cold War superpower, the Soviet Union, finally limped out of that "bleeding wound"—as Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev called Afghanistan. They would return to a sapped, fragmenting empire and a country that would implode less than two years later.

In that post-Afghan moment of victory—the end of the Cold War—nothing of the Russian experience was recognised as instructive for the last superpower on planet Earth. Here's my question, then: What if that first Afghan War was the real-world equivalent of a movie preview? Someday, when the second Afghan War finally ends and the US military limps home from its many imperial adventures abroad as the Red Army once did, will it, too, find an empire on the verge of imploding and a country in deep trouble?

Is that really beyond imagining anymore? And if it were so, wouldn't that be an anniversary to remember?

Venezuela's Constituent Assembly and the Rise of Fascism

Cira Pascual Marquina

A conversation with Julio Escalona, a socialist activist in Venezuela since his youth days, presently professor of economy in Venezuela's Central University, and member of Venezuela's Constituent Assembly.

Recently you wrote an article about the resurgence of fascism in our continent, as embodied in Brazilian presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro. You hypothesise that, if the economy continues its chaotic course and the

pauperisation of Venezuela's masses goes forward, a fascist option could emerge in here. Can you tell us about this?

As long as the welfare state existed and relations of power evolved under it, fascist projects were impeded. There have always been fascist practices, that is to say violence, torture, violations of human rights, attacks on democracy, which generally are fascist practices. They've always been present in Venezuela but without being the usual

political method. What's been usual in Venezuela has been a combination of forms of struggle: there was an authoritarian government, which was maintained by concessions to people and workers and also buttressed by repression, in what was called "the war against insurgents."

Today in global capitalism, finance capital has become hegemonic. Financial capital cannot coexist easily with democracy, because it liquidates the spaces of interclass negotiation, which was the social and political basis for representative democracy. Liquidating those spaces of negotiation means that there are two options: either a move toward fascism or a growing popular movement, which is what the Chavista period represented in Venezuela. The option that in fact emerged here was that of the popular movement and the practice of participative and protagonistic democracy.

Moreover, our popular struggle relied on something Chavez developed, which was both the worldview and the practice of solidarity. Practicing solidarity developed because people could see the advantages of solidarity, but it led the Empire to realise that the way to defeat Chavismo would be to defeat the concrete practice of solidarity here: stimulating individualism and promoting egoist solutions.

To do that, imperialism worked to make Venezuelan society chaotic, destroying forms of organisation and relations of solidarity. That is what has been happening in Venezuela: a process of destroying relations of solidarity along with a reawakening of individualism through what is here called *bachaqueo* [the widespread practice of acquiring subsidised products (i.e. cornmeal, toilet paper, etc.) and reselling them at higher prices], which is in essence the

individual solution. Individual solutions of that kind are only possible by damaging the collective, which is precisely what capital tries to do.

So we have entered into a process in which individual solutions have not exactly won out, but they have been strengthened and the fabric of solidarity has begun to weaken. One thing goes hand-in-hand with the other: you weaken the social fabric and relations of solidarity, at the same time as you strengthen individualism. That's what's underway right now in Venezuela.

Fascist experiences tend to result from a frustration of the popular movement. The popular movement had begun to emerge in Germany. The communist party got to be very strong there. However, defeating the communists and the socialists in Germany led to fascism, because the liberal position and especially the neoliberal position is based on weakening the state, but above all in weakening the state as a representative of the population's interests. At the same time, the state is strengthened as a vehicle of repression and persecution.

That's how we get to a situation of a fascist kind, since it amounts to strengthened power that is located above society, which decides people's rights and determining what is done and not done, while forcefully encouraging one to think about oneself. It tells you: it doesn't matter if you kill, it doesn't matter if you torture, it doesn't matter if it's a dictatorship. But you can work things out for yourself.

In Venezuela, the Right is trying to frustrate the Chavist process, because they know that frustrating it will lead to a reaction in the opposite direction. State power, which Chavismo used to respond to popular demands, could be used to

repress. This would go hand-in-hand with a fascist demagogic discourse, showing how you can enrich yourself, you can live better. That discourse tells you: you shouldn't be so stupid as to think about other people!

Faced with this, what is the government doing?

The government should confront this situation. It has the political and legal tools—all the necessary instruments to confront the Right's main tactic today, which is permanently raising prices. The Right does this because it's what most hurts the people. As a result you cannot buy a kilo of meat. Nobody can buy it! That's the truth! Nor can you buy a kilo of chicken.

That's to say the basic goods that people use can't be bought, but neither can you get anything else. When they became aware that the people were eating vegetables, then they raised their prices. Salaries were raised significantly as a result of the measures taken by President Maduro, and when they became aware of this, what did they do? They raised prices to such a degree that salaries now don't allow you to buy anything!

The government has to confront inflation, and it possesses the means to do so. It can establish a new relation between the Bolivar and the Petro and raise the real salary. Those are steps that can be taken. They are not easy of course, because businessmen will begin to hoard basic goods. However, the government also has the instruments to solve these problems.

On the subject of fascism, in 2017 we saw a fascist uprising. **It was in the face of this fascist outbreak that President Maduro called for a National Constituent Assembly (ANC), which had two**

tasks. The first was to change the correlation of forces to end the fascist insurrection. That was successful. However, the ANC also was charged with writing a new constitution. Can you tell us how the ANC is working internally? Has there been a debate in commissions and is the new constitution being developed?

The idea that the government had in convoking the ANC was, as you said, to defeat street violence. The Venezuelan people understood this clearly and massively went out to vote for it.

But the question of violence was not properly understood. People have said: “peace triumphed.” However, what was defeated was street violence, so the opposition changed their form of struggle and began a battle on the economic front, which is where we have not been able to defeat them.

So, we defeated the street violence but not the economic war. One form of violence was ended, but other forms became stronger. It’s there that they have hit most hard. That’s the case because while the street violence jammed up the city and created chaos, it never had the people’s support.

For that reason, defeating street violence was easy. Maduro did what one does in that sort of situation: appeal to the people. Convoking the ANC was a way of mobilising people, and that was correct. Nevertheless, where we have not been able to mobilise people is in the struggle against the economic war.

Winning that struggle would require making people conscious of the nature of the problem. It’s a question of awareness because the Chavista movement, the Bolivarian movement, has enough people to deal with the economic emergency. Yet it’s there that we have failed, in

mobilising people to confront the economic war.

Additionally, the government has not taken the steps to limit prices and keep basic goods from disappearing—in effect, all the things that make up the economic war. If it’s a war, that means it cannot be resolved only through dialogue. In a war, of course, there are spaces for dialogue, but only if you have both sides wanting to negotiate. But what in fact happened is one side wanted to dialogue and the other side pretended to want to do it, went to the table, approved things that they immediately broke, making the government appear ridiculous in front of the population.

The government says, “We agreed on such and such prices.” What’s more, the businessmen sign it and it comes out in the official bulletin, but they break the agreement immediately. Breaking the agreement has to be punished by the state! It hasn’t done so! For me, that is the most serious problem that we have now because it could cause the population to lose confidence in the government.

Up until now, the government has been strong because it has maintained people’s confidence. That is what was proven in recent elections. If that confidence is broken, then we might have a critical situation.

Fascist spaces now exist in Venezuela without having had either the opportunity nor the leadership to go forward. The internal Right [within the government] is working to open opportunities for fascism, while, from the outside, imperialism is working to find the leaders who can direct the movement. So I think the political struggle in Venezuela has to face the possibility that a fascist movement could emerge that would have a base in the country...

That danger exists in Venezuela, and I think it is our most serious problem now.

What is happening with the National Constituent Assembly? Are the commissions meeting? Is there debate?

The National Constituent Assembly has been working and there is ample evidence of that. The commissions (workgroups by area, such as economy, gender, etc) are the ones that have most of the work for now, but those are closed-door spaces.

The problem, from my point of view, is that even though the ANC has approved open debates in the street, in the barrios, in rural areas, etc., that hasn’t happened. A void exists, and it has to be filled soon! The debate internally within the ANC cannot remain inside the four walls of the Assembly chambers. The leadership, the heads of commissions, the delegates—everybody must go out to debate in public squares, in the barrios.

I myself have been to open meetings, but initiatives like that have occurred as a personal project. They are not enough. According to Hermann Escarra, who heads up the Constitutional Commission, eighty percent of the constitution’s text is ready, but, where is the debate? The open debate? I assume that this problem will be solved. The truth is that nobody has to ask for permission to debate.

Now, what you should understand is that class struggle expresses itself in all societies and in all spaces of society. Thus, class struggle is also found within the government. I’m not making an accusation; it’s simply a fact. There is a very active class struggle in Venezuela, and it expresses itself within the government, within labor

unions, and within all communities. It's necessary to overcome the closed-door tendencies in this class struggle.

In recent months, popular Chavista movements have begun to question the government. They insist on being heard, and they want the government to rectify its errors. The best-known case is the Admirable Campesino March. Can you tell us about this new phenomenon—these rebellious movements that are emerging within Chavismo—and particularly about how Venezuela's peasant movement might help to revitalise and rebuild the Bolivarian Process.

The emergence of the campesinos in the public arena is very important. Indeed, it is the most important political event in recent times.

Campesinos are a key social element in Venezuela. After all, they form part of a long struggle and they produce our food. In Venezuela, much of what we consume daily is campesino production. The old landowning class, the agribusiness sector, produces to export. The emerging agrarian Chavista capitalist class, which is for now midsize, does the same. Actually, even some of the campesinos' production ends up in Colombia as a result of paramilitary networks. Campesinos have been denouncing this.

We have three very active borders in Venezuela. The one with Colombia is the most active, but we also have important borders with Brazil and with the Caribbean islands. In a small boat, you can reach many Caribbean islands. It's very hard to control the ocean, and there is a lot of open-ocean smuggling of agricultural products. Of course, the contraband is sold in exchange for hard currency, for US dollars, which are a draw.

This is a very serious problem. But despite the large amount of contraband, the fruits and vegetables that we eat daily are still produced by campesinos.

The government must sit and dialogue, as equals, with the country's campesino organisations. The Admirable Campesino March, as important as it is, is not the only expression of campesino organisation today. There are many, many campesino organisations in the country that must be heard.

There will be a Campesino Congress to address these issues. It probably won't happen this year due to the elections. Most likely it will be next year, probably in January. The Campesino Congress must directly address class struggle in the rural areas and attempt to resolve this struggle in favor of the Venezuelan nation, in favor of the people, and, by the same token, in favor of the campesinos who produce what we eat.

To go forward, it's important that campesino organisations develop as spaces of unity and political consciousness. They must unite the campesinos in the struggle against large landowners, pushing for an alliance with the state, making the state come to their side. If that doesn't happen, the problem of the rural areas will not be solved, and we will not be able to solve our problems related to food supply and prices. The solution lies in the campesino bloc, which the Venezuelan state must listen to, offering real solutions.

Today, there is an open struggle between the large and medium agrarian bourgeoisie versus the campesinos. The only actor that can solve this very serious crisis in favor of the campesino bloc is the state. So the state, the government, must act! Only the state can solve

this situation, as it has the police, the apparatus of repression (a part of which, by the way, is actually participating in the smuggling business and is connected to non-campesino interests).

Can you tell us more about the importance of class struggle in the countryside today?

There are two very important factors to consider today in analysing class struggle in Venezuela. The first is a campesino bloc, which is growing in organisational terms and also making demands that are just ones. This is not a problem, we should see this as a blessing!

The second factor is the struggle between the campesinos versus the large and middle landowning class. Finally, there is a third factor: mercenary forces (as well as, in some cases, state forces), that are participating directly, and they are not siding with the campesinos. These mercenary forces are already in action: they steal and even burn farmers' crops.

All this is not being talked about, but it needs to be known. The violence created by non-campesino groups is leading, once again, to displacement of campesinos towards urban areas. These displaced campesinos are entering urban pockets of poverty.

We should understand that big capital and especially finance capital aims to take control of all spaces. There is a very real process of privatising war, and that is why it is important to point to the growth of mercenary forces. We must understand that finance capital—a supranational power with local relations—is operating here.

When mercenaries come to the scene and displace campesinos, they are acting on behalf of supranational interests. The mercenary forces in Venezuela aren't a bunch of petty

criminals. They form part of a strategically organised project, and their mission is to take over the Venezuelan countryside. The class war in Venezuela has an important mercenary component.

So again, in this open and intense struggle, the government must side with the campesinos.

We know of your deep concern for

the fate of the Bolivarian Process . .

It is a well-known fact that Venezuela is a region of particular geopolitical interest for imperialism. This is not only because of our natural resources, which are important enough, but also because there has been a revolution here. The example set by a profound process of change is a serious problem for them.

Venezuela has been able to

defeat all imperialist offensives, and that represents a challenge for them. Imperialism is intent on defeating the Bolivarian Process. That is why this process is of great importance for the peoples of the world, and if it was defeated, it would begin to close off revolutionary paths. That is why I believe that international solidarity with Venezuela is a revolutionary duty for internationalists.

What's Keeping the World from Ending AIDS

Vijay Prashad

If you cure illnesses, said Goldman Sachs vice-president Salveen Richter, it will disrupt “sustained cash flow.” Far better to find medical treatments that provide some solace but that prolong illnesses. Even better if these treatments are both necessary and expensive.

If you find a cure for an illness, then you will find—as Richter wrote in her analysis for Goldman Sachs—“a gradual exhaustion of the prevalent pool of patients.” That’s the worst thing imaginable for pharmaceutical companies and their investors. Keep the goose alive as long as it keeps laying golden eggs.

December 1, is World AIDS Day. In 1987, two public information officers at the United Nations’ World Health Organization (WHO) came up with the idea of such a day, which was then promoted by the UN from 1988 onwards.

For a decade, World AIDS Day helped shape public consciousness about the ferocity of the disease. By 1990, almost 300,000 people had died of acquired immune deficiency syndrome per year, while about 10 million people carried the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) that

causes AIDS.

World AIDS Day and activist groups fought to ensure that AIDS was not seen as a curse on homosexual men and that it was seen as both preventable and curable. This was an enormous burden, given the homophobia in many societies and the cuts to public health that states around the world were being forced into by the policy framework of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

By 2018, 30 years after the origin of World AIDS Day, it is assumed that such concern is anachronistic. There is a sense that homophobia is less virulent and that the health-care industries—both the pharmaceutical and medical sides—have taken hold of this epidemic.

By last count of the WHO, more than 70 million people have been afflicted with HIV, and by the end of 2017, 36.9 million people were living with the virus (less than 1% of the world’s population). It is true that in many parts of the world, HIV has been brought under control by technologies of prevention and of care. Part of this is because the health-care infrastructure in the affluent world has not been totally devastated and partly because the

pharmaceutical industry has come up with successful drugs to contain the virus.

This is, of course, not the case for the affluent world’s working poor, who are sapped by the evisceration of health care.

In other parts of the world—in Africa and Asia, for instance—HIV continues to be very dangerous. In large parts of the African continent, 1 in 25 adults has the virus, just above 4% of adults. These men and women make up two-thirds of all those people who carry HIV.

What is important to focus on is that they live in countries where the IMF has systematically undermined state-provided health care—particularly primary health care—and where the cost of the drugs to contain HIV remains prohibitive.

It might well be that in the affluent parts of the world one can be sanguine about the HIV/AIDS epidemic. But it is certainly not something to dismiss in large parts of the world where states remain under pressure to cut costs and where pharmaceutical companies find human bodies upon whom to do test trials rather than to cure.

Right to health

It has long been the hope of human beings that preventable diseases should be eradicated by way of changes in behavior and the use of medicines. Every Indian child in the 1970s remembers the government posters that urged people to boil their water and to get vaccinated. It was thought that primary health care and education about health would pave the way toward a healthier world.

At the 1978 WHO conference at the then-Soviet city of Alma Ata (now Almaty, Kazakhstan), governments of most countries said that by the year 2000 the level of health would permit people “to lead a socially and economically productive life.” It was underlined that “primary health care is the key to attaining this target as part of development in the spirit of social justice.”

Since 1978, the UN General Assembly has regularly argued, as it did in 2012, for “universal access to affordable and quality health-care services.” But the policy framework pushed on the majority of the countries of the world went in the other direction.

The focus on the bad policy choices pushed on these countries should have been laser-sharp after the Ebola outbreak of 2013–2016 in West Africa. An important study in *The Lancet* in 2015 found that in the three countries hit hardest by the outbreak—Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone—IMF policies had forced the governments to undermine their health-care delivery services.

The study found that in Sierra Leone, IMF policies had severely reduced the number public sector employees. Between 1995 and 1996, the IMF required the state to cut 28% of its employees, including

those in the health delivery sector. Stuningly, the WHO found that the number of Sierra Leone’s community health-care workers fell from 0.11 per 1,000 of the population in 2004 to 0.02 per 1,000 in 2008. This was the absolute antithesis of the Alma Ata Declaration.

Last week, in Savar, Bangladesh, delegates assembled for the fourth People’s Health Assembly. They came from far and wide, arguing for a return to the dynamic of which the Alma Ata Declaration was a part.

The situation is now at an emergency footing, with public health institutions virtually destroyed and with plunder by pharmaceutical companies a normal situation. The WHO and World Bank have found that by 2010, nearly 808 million people had incurred “catastrophic spending on health” because of the costs of drugs and because of the privatisation of health care.

There is virtually no outrage at the IMF policy framework that destroys the health-care infrastructure in the Global South. Saccharine pop-star humanism that began with Bob Geldof’s “Do They Know It’s Christmas (1984) merges with the equally syrupy tech-philanthropy of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2000) to throw a shroud over the African continent.

Nothing that Bono and Bill can do undermines the sharp edge of IMF policy and the theft of Africa’s riches by monopoly firms (including those mining companies that provide the raw materials for the computers that made Bill Gates his wealth).

Return of AIDS

Last April, the UN General Assembly heard the summary of a report on the need for urgency regarding the return of AIDS. Even though AIDS deaths have

declined since 2010 by a third, there has been a recent uptick in the number of deaths. This is of concern. Serious-minded public health specialists worry that this rise in AIDS deaths has come as health infrastructure has been weakened and as pharmaceutical companies continue to charge absurdly high prices for HIV/AIDS drugs.

The same month, ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), which was founded in 1987, held a protest in New York City against Gilead Sciences, a monopoly pharmaceutical company. The drug in question for ACT UP is Truvada, which reduces the chances of HIV infection. ACT UP says that a course of Truvada costs Gilead about US\$6 a month to manufacture, but it charges patients an astronomical \$1,500 a month. What is scandalous is that the research for this drug was funded not by Gilead but by public funds and by philanthropists.

When a Goldman Sachs analyst says that the point is to make money from illness, she is merely mirroring the reality of the brutishness of capitalism. Serious conversations need to take place about the way in which monopoly pharmaceutical firms draw public funds to protect themselves from risk and then charge high prices to make astronomical profits.

Questions also need to be asked about the IMF policy space that makes it impossible to detect the virus ahead of time and even harder to care for its victims.

It’s not enough to wear a ribbon on World AIDS Day. Go out on to the streets with a group of friends. Carry a sign. Let it say: “More Public Health and Cheaper Drugs.” If you want to end HIV/AIDS by 2030, the prescription is as simple as that.



Acharya Vinoba



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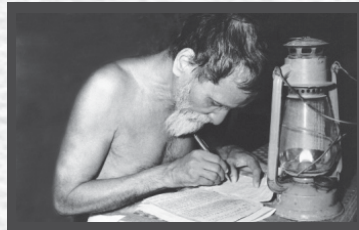
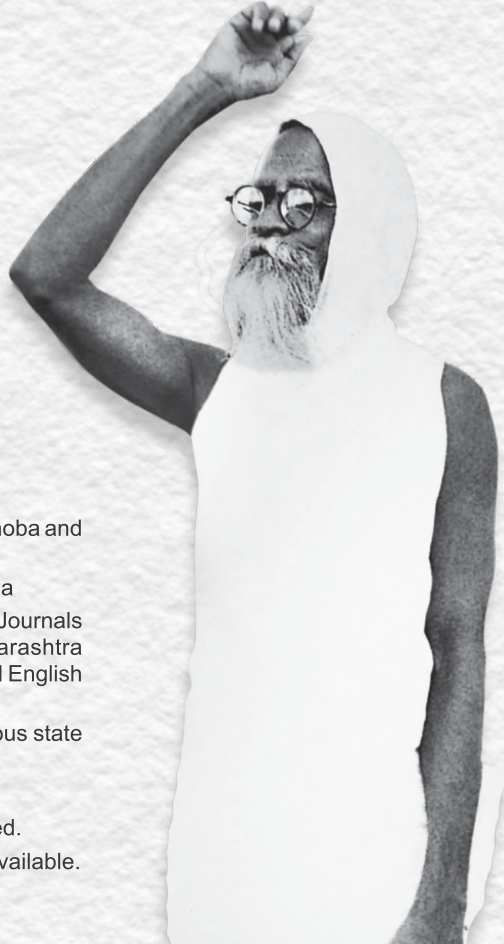
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Acharya Vinoba - a spiritual leader was also an academic scholar and had studied all religions in depth. He was a philosopher, well-known author, educationist and sociologist. He had initiated and lead the Bhoodan and Gramdan movement. Paramdham Prakashan (ग्रामसेवा मंडळ) Pavanar with the help of Maharashtra Knowledge Corporation Limited has developed www.vinoba.in website in which the entire literature of Acharya Vinoba is hosted.

**An eloquent insight into the thoughts of
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Press note on the Rafale judgment, 14 December 2018

A Shocking And Disappointing Judgement

Yashwant Sinha, Arun Shourie and Prashant Bhushan

The judgement of the Supreme Court dismissing our petition seeking an independent court monitored investigation into the Rafale deal is as shocking as it is disappointing. We had gone to court after making a detailed complaint to the CBI pointing out the following:

The Prime Minister signed an agreement for 36 Rafale jets on 10th April 2015 without any such requirement of 36 jets given by the Air Force headquarters and without the approval of the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), which are the mandated first steps for any defence procurement.

The Air Force had in fact been asking for at least 126 fighter jets which had been approved by the DAC, tenders had been issued, 6 companies had applied, two were short-listed and finally Dassault was selected as the lowest tender. The tender was on the basis that 126 fighters would be procured out of which only 18 would be bought in a ready-to-fly condition and the remaining would be manufactured in India by HAL with transfer of technology by Dassault.

By 25th March, the tender negotiations had been virtually

completed with Dassault. The CEO of Dassault in the presence of top officials of IAF and HAL had said that the contract negotiations were 95% complete and that the deal would be inked soon. There was nothing to suggest that the deal had run into rough weather. However on 10th April the Prime Minister unilaterally signed a 36 aircraft deal with the French President, all to be purchased in a ready-to-fly condition. Thus 126 was reduced to 36, transfer of technology and 'Make in India' was knocked out and a clause for offset partners was brought in. Exactly at this time Anil Ambani registered a new company Reliance Defence, and Dassault entered into a partnership with this company which was to get the bulk of the offset contract from this deal. The then French President Hollande also confirmed later in an interview that the choice of Reliance Defence, a brand new company with no credibility or experience in defence manufacturing, was made by the Indian government and the French had nothing to do with it.

It thereafter transpired that the benchmark price of 36 Rafale aircrafts was fixed by three senior

officials in the price negotiating committee, at 5.2 billion euros. However this price was unilaterally increased by the cabinet committee on security headed by the Prime Minister to 8.2 billion euros and the contract was finally awarded for 7.2 billion euros. The per aircraft cost for the 36 aircraft deal comes to around Rs 1,650 crore. This can be contrasted with the price mentioned by the then Defence Minister Parrikar himself in an interview immediately after 10th April 2015, where he said that the 126 aircrafts in the earlier deal would have cost around Rs 90,000 crore, which is about Rs 715 crore per aircraft.

It was on these facts which were all documented in the complaint to the CBI, that we sought a court monitored investigation (when the CBI did not register an FIR on our complaint which is mandatory as per law).

The Court's judgement today does not even address the documented facts stated in our petition or deal with our main prayer seeking an investigation. On the contrary, it proceeds on the basis that we were challenging the contract itself and uses the facts stated by the government either in the short open affidavit filed or perhaps facts claimed in the sealed cover handed only to the court which was never shared with us. In fact some of the facts mentioned in the court judgement are not only not on record but are patently incorrect.

The Court mentions in para 25 that "The pricing details have, however, been shared with the Comptroller and Auditor General (hereinafter referred to as CAG), and the report of the CAG has been examined by the Public Accounts

Committee (hereafter referred to as PAC). Only a redacted portion of the report was placed before the Parliament, and is in public domain."

All the facts mentioned above are neither on record nor factually correct. The CAG judgment has not been submitted to the Public Accounts Committee and no portion of the CAG report has been placed before Parliament or placed in the public domain. Obviously this factually incorrect statement must be based on some communication (not on record and unknown to us) made by the government to the court. That the court has relied on such communication which is factually incorrect on 3 counts shows how dangerous it is for the court to rely on statements made in a sealed cover (not subject to scrutiny or verification) and give its judgement on that basis.

It is astounding that the court has stated such a patently incorrect fact in its short judgement. The court has also mentioned in the same para that the Chief of the Indian Air Force had communicated his reservation regarding the disclosure of the pricing details which would adversely affect national security. This alleged fact was also not on record and it is not understood as to where and how the court got this. The court has also mentioned that Air Force officials were examined by the court on the acquisition process and pricing. This is also factually incorrect as the only question asked of the Air Force officials by the court and the only questions they answered was about whether the Rafale aircraft belonged to the 3rd, 4th and 5th generation and when did the last acquisition take place. They were neither questioned, nor did they say anything, on the

acquisition process or on pricing. At least this did not happen during court proceedings.

On the acquisition process, the court obligingly accepts the government claim that the acquisition process in the earlier 126 aircraft deal got stuck and was not going ahead, which is why the new deal of 36 aircrafts had to be made. The court does not even deal with the facts mentioned by us completely shredding this claim of the government, where we had annexed a video of the CEO of Dassault of 25th march 2015 saying that the negotiations was 95% complete and the deal would be inked soon. He had also said that Dassault would remain complaint to the RFP and that they were happy and satisfied with HAL. The Court also does not deal with the specific issue of violation of the procurement procedure raised by us, that the PM signed the 36 aircraft deal with the French government on 10th April, before any requirement given by the Air Force for 36 aircrafts and before DAC okaying the need to buy 36 aircrafts without any transfer of technology or 'Make in India'.

The fact as we showed is, that no procedure was followed. The Prime Minister unilaterally announced a new deal and the CCS rubber stamped these with retrospective effect. The Court takes a dangerous step: in condoning the total disregard of procedures, the court cites clause 75 which says, "any deviation from the prescribed procedure will be put up to DAC through DPP for approval". Were this to become the norm for subsequent judicial examination, wrong doers in control of governments would have a carte blanche. They could do what they want—as the PM did

in this instance—and then have it retrospectively rubber stamped by DAC etc.

On the issue of price the court says that, “We have examined closely the price details and comparison of the prices of the basic aircraft along with escalation costs as under the original RFP as well as under the IGA. We have also gone through the explanatory note on the costing, item wise. Suffice it to say that as per the price details, the official respondents claim there is a commercial advantage in the purchase of 36 Rafale aircrafts. The official respondents have claimed that there are certain better terms in IGA qua the maintenance and weapon package. It is certainly not the job of this Court to carry out a comparison of the pricing details in matters like the present. We say no more as the material has to be kept in a confidential domain.”

The Court does not even refer to or deal with the facts disclosed by us about the sudden increase of the benchmark price from 5.2 billion to 8.2 billion euros, despite the objections of three relevant official experts in the price negotiating committee who were subsequently transferred out. It however curiously mentions a CAG report on this issue which fact was never stated and is nonexistent.

On the issue of offset contracts to Ambani’s Company the court says that this was to be decided by Dassault which was already in negotiation with Reliance since 2012. This despite the fact that the Reliance Company with which Dassault was once discussing, was a completely different company of Mukesh Ambani and had nothing

to do with the new company of Anil Ambani incorporated at the time of the 2015 deal. The court also overlooks the specific provisions of the DPP and the offset guidelines pointed out by us which requires every offset contract to be approved by the Raksha Mantri himself.

On this basis the court concludes that there is no reason for any intervention by the Court on the sensitive issue of purchase of 36 aircrafts by the Indian government. It says that “perception of individuals cannot be the basis of a fishing and roving enquiry by the Court.”

The Court overlooks the fact that we were not seeking any enquiry by the court but only an independent investigation by the CBI or SIT. The law on this has been laid down in a Constitution bench of the Supreme Court in Lalita Kumari’s case which says that if allegations made in a complaint are of a criminal offence, an FIR must be registered and investigation must be made. The allegations in the complaint by us were of huge commissions being given to Ambani’s company through the guise of offset contracts in a deal which was contrived to ensure that such commissions would be paid.

It is in these circumstances that we say that we are shocked and disappointed by the court’s judgment. However, since the court has not examined nor said that it was examining the facts in detail, and has dismissed the petition only on the basis of its perception of its own jurisdiction under article 32 of the Constitution, this judgment can by no means be considered to be the Supreme Court’s clean chit to this deal. As mentioned in our complaint, all the facts and circumstances show that this was an unholy deal which has compromised national security,

plundered our public exchequer and will bleed our public sector defence company HAL. This contrived deal has been struck only for the purpose of giving large commissions to Anil Ambani’s company in the guise of offset contracts. The Supreme Court’s judgment is thus by no means a clean chit to the government on this deal. The Courts judgment is in line with earlier judgments of the courts in the Bofors case and in the Birla Sahara case where we have seen that courts have stopped short of ordering independent investigations in matters involving corruption in high places or even given judgments seeking to put a lid on those cases. The issue will continue to agitate the public mind until there is full public disclosure of all the facts and a comprehensive and independent investigation into the deal.

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Understanding Interfaith Dialogue: A Few Critical Questions

Neha Dabhade

The issue of constructing a temple of Lord Ram on the disputed site where the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya once stood and was demolished in 1992 is once again hitting the headlines. The construction of the temple is being touted as an article of faith and the litmus test to prove respect for sentiments of 'Hindus'. This demand becomes all the more threatening when there is aggressive mobilisation to intimidate the democratic institutions like the judiciary and also the communities perceived as 'others'. This is but just one of the many examples of manipulations and contestations that are being played out in the name of religion in India which is proving to be a strain on the peaceful and harmonious inter-community relations in India.

In this context, one of the solutions being promoted is to establish inter-faith dialogue and through this dialogue build understanding between the different religions. However, it would be misplaced optimism and perhaps even a folly to believe that by speaking about the positives of our own religions in a closed conference room, one can establish any meaningful dialogue or even understand the essence of the different religions. Any sincere attempt at interfaith dialogue will require an earnest reflection about our own religion, the power structures it nurtures, the inequalities it institutionalises and also the injustices it may perpetuate.

Such a dialogue will help each community understand their own traditions, faith, beliefs and

value system in the light of other religions. A critical understanding of other religions enables us to reflect internally within our own religions. Thus, my participation in an interfaith consultation recently was a very enriching experience for me since it opened avenues of learning and assiduous critical reflection into our own faiths. The Consultation called *Seeking Life Together: Interfaith Resistance to Religious Bigotry and Discrimination based on Caste and Gender* was organised by Collective of Dalit Ecumenical Christian Scholars (CODECS) in collaboration with the Mennonite Brethren Centenary Bible College (MBCBC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC).

Some of the important reflections and challenges that the meet deliberated upon were crucial. For a nuanced understanding of interfaith dialogue and relations, it becomes imperative to peel layers of discrimination that institutionalised religions perpetrate with the help of scriptures and normative narratives. I have listed a few down below.

The Question of Gender

The question of gender equality is central to all religions and has unfortunately been a grim one. Women have been discriminated in the socio-cultural realm by citing justifications from religious narratives. In the seminar too, the question of subordination of women was raised very strongly. Different speakers tried to deconstruct patriarchy and patriarchal structures / understanding of scriptures.

Making a case for Dalit women in the Church, it was argued that Dalit women are "Dalit within the Dalit" thus pointing out how the axis of gender and caste lead to double discrimination of Dalit women in the Church. While support is sought from a patriarchal understanding or interpretation of biblical scriptures to entrench the lower status of women within the family and society at large, the plight of Dalit women becomes all the more aggravated due to caste identity. What perhaps was most moving and inspiring was the narrative of a Dalit woman reverend herself, who explained this oppression citing her personal journey. She explained that women face strong resistance when they try to penetrate the Church administrative structures which largely till date remain male dominated. Women's emancipation is viewed as a threat to the social order understood to be formed by God. This resistance becomes stronger if the woman is a Dalit. There was a demand to deconstruct the understanding of biblical scriptures which legitimises hierarchy and subordination of women.

The status of Muslim women evinced intense debates and interest. Two perspectives emerged. One, that the scriptures are a source of liberation and provide space for negotiating rights of Muslim women; and the other more critical one, which questioned the scriptures which are used to subordinate women. These perspectives came from the lived experiences of women who have been working with

Muslim communities in South Asia. Women's organisations working on issues of Muslim women are grappling with the discrimination faced by Muslim women in the areas of marriage, property, education and their overall socio-economic status in society. The orthodoxy often cites from the Quran to justify this discrimination. However it is equally true that there are also liberal interpretations of the Quran which have provided spaces to women to negotiate for their rights in day to day lives. But more often than not, the vested clergy and elite in the community interpret the scriptures in a way to subjugate the women.

There was a strong argument about how the discrimination faced by Muslim women is manipulated by communal forces to stigmatise and demonise Islam as a religion and also the Muslim community as being 'backward' and 'fundamentalist'. This adds to the pressure on Muslim women to sweep their questions and demands for reforms under the carpet and in effect does more harm to their cause of justice and equality. The struggles of Muslim women are at the crossroads of communal politics and patriarchy faced within the community.

It will be misleading to think that identity politics is affecting the lives of Muslim women alone and pushing them deeper into the folds of patriarchy. Women in Hindu communities are also used as pawns to play out communal politics by firmly placing them in the realm of their homes to strengthen the discourses of women being reproducers of children. Hindu women are mobilised by communal forces to construct exclusionist narratives of nationalism where Muslims are portrayed as the

common enemy, and are misled into believing that they are working to "save" their religion by indulging in propaganda of hatred. But this political agenda, despite being based on hatred, gives women the bargaining power to participate in the public sphere. For example, they are out on the streets to stop other women who wish to enter the Sabarimala temple, or to shield their male relatives when they participate in communal violence against the "others". Their concerns of equality within families, equal opportunity in terms of education and livelihoods and their agency in terms of marriages and relationships are sidelined or even opposed. Therefore reforms and a critical reflection on the orthodoxy within communities are absolutely essential if there has to be interfaith dialogue.

The Question of Caste

Caste system in India has seeped into other religions though it's not integral to their theology. The caste system which is a system of graded hierarchy or inequality has shaped the Hindu communities. The Dalits who were at the receiving end of the practice of untouchability, discrimination and dehumanisation for centuries tried to find alternatives to Hindu religion, which had been critiqued by Ambedkar in no uncertain terms. Some of the Dalits turned to Islam and Christianity in their quest for equality and acceptance. However, the persons who converted couldn't escape their caste identity. There were conversions into Islam and Christianity from upper caste Hindu religions too. This privileged group drew caste boundaries within the other religions too and reproduced brahminical culture and discourses.

And so, caste system came to haunt the Dalits in Islam and Christianity too. For instance, there are separate churches for Dalit Christians or separate mosques for Dalit Muslims.

Though there is no notion of purity and pollution in Islam and Christianity, the condition of Pasmada Muslims and Dalit Christians is appalling. The philosophy of caste is quite contradictory to the basic beliefs of Islam which explicitly emphasise equality and universal brotherhood. Islam may be normatively egalitarian, but actually existing Islam in Indian conditions is deeply hierarchical. There is a need to democratise Islam in India. The resistance of Muslim Dalits and Christian Dalits leads to a larger question of democratisation and forging a counter-hegemonic solidarity that has the potentiality and can prove to be a powerful resource for more humane interfaith dialogue.

The question of inclusion

This brings us to the question about what is the nature of religion. Religion was made for human beings and not vice-versa. Thus, one has to raise the question, is the imagery of God congruent to that of a poor man? A black man? A Dalit? A woman? Does God in the present understanding and form really dialogue with a poor or unprivileged person not conforming to the normal in society? Is institutionalised religion really inclusive? Does it emphasise humility, simplicity, concern for the poor? There are examples like Basavanna and other bhakti traditions along with Sufi saints who through their living exemplified poverty and labour. Basavanna exalted physical labour

into a religious ideology and weaved a counter narrative to caste driven brahminical society and morality. In one of famous vachanas, he says:

*The rich will make temples for Shiva.
What shall I, a poor man, do?
My legs are pillars,
the body the shrine, the head a
cupola of gold.*

These thinkers and philosophers envisaged a different social order—one which was based on rationality, equality and justice. This was a sincere attempt at democratisation of religion. Such values are most needed today where institutionalised religion is manipulated to privilege certain sections.

What should interfaith actually mean?

Interfaith dialogue is largely understood to be a process to promote tolerance of other religions. It is understood to grapple with the question as to how one is to instruct youth in the religious beliefs and values of their community, while encouraging them to be tolerant of beliefs and values deemed to be incompatible with their own. In this process, it is already presupposed that one's own religion is liberal, inclusive and perfect. Interfaith dialogues eulogise institutional religions and focus on so called progressive discourses within each religion. But no attempt is made to look at within our own religion in a rational and critical manner.

One has to acknowledge that there exists fundamentalism in every religion. Therefore, there is scope for reform in every religion. If one acknowledges this and critically reflects on one's own religion and values it promotes, this understanding perhaps will manifest in everyday conduct and social

order. The critical gaze instead of being on other religions should be projected within. As Kabir very rightly pointed out:

*Bura jo dekhna main chala, bura na
milaya koi*

*Jo man khoja apna, toh mujhsa bura
na koi.*

Why Gandhi and Marx Are More Relevant Now Than Ever Before

Ashish Kothari

The 150th birth anniversary year of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and the 200th birth anniversary of Karl Marx went by this year. Such anniversaries can become occasions of tokenism—for instance, the Indian government has set up a committee with more than 100 members to coordinate celebrations of Gandhi's anniversary, crammed with political bigwigs from various parties, a few academics and Gandhian workers. I am sceptical whether it has achieved anything more than a significantly heightened scale of the hypocritical display that October 2 brings around every year. Hopefully I'm mistaken, but since any meaningful homage to Gandhi would call into question the very fundamentals of today's political and economic power, and point a sharply critical gaze at the rampant abuse of religion and nationalism, I think I'm pretty safe in being sceptical. And so too perhaps for Marx, at least where the celebrations are being led by so-called revolutionary governments in those parts of the world where Leftist parties still hold power.

This does not mean that these two figures are of no relevance

(I started searching for the devil but could not find anyone. When I searched inside me, I realised there is no one more devilish than me.)

This may lead to different sections of the society having a meaningful dialogue with each other, and will include the marginalised, in turn making such interactions more humane.

now. On the contrary, they are even more so than before. Their legacy is crucial for the majority of the world's population, marginalised by capitalism, statism, patriarchy and other structures of oppression. As it is for the rest of nature, so badly abused by humanity. And it is a legacy that is still alive and thriving, not so much in the orthodox Gandhian and Marxist organisations and in academic circles where the tussle between the two 'ideologies' is more dominant than the urge to make them relevant to the struggles of the marginalised, as in these struggles themselves.

Resistance and construction

And so we must turn for hope to the many movements of *sangharsh* (resistance) and *nirman* (construction) throughout the world. These movements realise that the injustices they are facing, and the choices they must make, are not bound by the divides that ideologues play games with.

Let's take *sangharsh*. At any given time in India, there are dozens of sites where Adivasis, farmers, fisherpersons, pastoralists and others

are refusing to part with their land or forest or water to make way for so-called development projects. One thousand farmers have filed objections to their lands being taken up by the Prime Minister's pet project, the bullet train. News that is both inspiring and depressing keeps coming from Latin America, of indigenous people standing up for their territorial rights against mining and oil extraction, and all too frequently paying the price when state or corporate forces kill their leaders. Nationwide rallies were organised by the National Alliance of People's Movements and the Ekta Parishad in October. They involved movements for land and forest rights, communal harmony, workers' security and other causes that are not so easy to place in any ideological camp.

The same goes for *nirman*, or the construction of alternatives. Across the world there are incredible examples of sustainable and holistic agriculture, community-led water/energy/ food sovereignty, worker takeover of production facilities, resource/ knowledge commons, local governance, community health and alternative learning, inter-community peace-building, reassertion of cultural diversity, gender and sexual pluralism, and much else.

It is in many of these alternative movements that I find inspiration for building on the legacies of Gandhi and Marx (and Ambedkar, Rabindranath Tagore, Rosa Luxemburg and various other luminaries) and, equally important, on the many indigenous and Adivasi, Dalit, peasant and other 'folk' revolutionaries through history. There are many examples that dot the Indian landscape: the few

thousand Dalit women farmers who have achieved *anna swaraj* (food sovereignty) in Telangana while also transforming their gender and caste status; the several dozen Gond Adivasi villages in Gadchiroli that have formed a Maha Gram Sabha to stop mining, and work on their own vision of governance and livelihood security; a Dalit sarpanch near Chennai who combines both Marxist and Gandhian principles in his attempt to transform the village he lives in. Similarly, there are others across the world: a thousand people have experimented with anarchic community life in the 'freetown' of Christiania in Copenhagen for four decades; indigenous peoples in Peru, Canada and Australia have gained territorial autonomy; small peasants in Africa and Latin America have sustained or gone back to organic farming; fisherpersons in the South Pacific have their own network of sustainably managed marine sites.

What I find of significance in many resistance and alternative movements is the exploration of autonomy, self-reliance, people's governance of politics and the economy, freedom with responsibility for the freedom of others, and respect for the rest of nature. While these movements do often call for policy interventions from a more accountable state, there is also an underlying antipathy to the centralised state, as there is in both Gandhian *swaraj* and in Marxist communism and in many versions of anarchy. Private property is also challenged. In 2013, the Gond village Mendha-Lekha in Maharashtra converted all its agricultural land into the commons. Note that commons here does not mean state-owned, a distorted form of 'communism' that has prevailed

in orthodox Leftist state regimes.

Bridging gaps

And while Gandhi was weak on challenging capital, and Marx on stressing the fundamental spiritual or ethical connections amongst humans, these movements often tend to bridge these gaps. Insofar as many of them integrate the need to re-establish ecological resilience and wisdom, some even arguing for extending equal respect to other species, they also encompass Marx's vision of a society that bridges humanity's 'metabolic rift' with nature, and Gandhi's repeated emphasis on living lightly on earth. With this they also challenge the very fundamentals of 'development', especially its mad fixation on economic growth, reliance on ever-increasing production and consumption, and its utter disregard for inequality.

This is not to suggest that Gandhi and Marx can be happily married; there are points of tension (for instance, on the issue of non-violence as a principle). There are points of ambiguity in recognising that indigenous peoples have already lived many elements of their dreams. But I have found enough in grassroots movements to be convinced that there is critical common ground amongst them, if our ultimate goals are well-being, justice and equity, based on ecological wisdom. We would do well to honour their legacy by identifying such common ground and building on the struggles and creativity of 'ordinary' people in communities across the world.

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The Poetics Of Statues

Dr. A. Raghu Kumar

Men construct huge structures, make endowments, inscribe their names on monuments, create memorials, demonstrate their authority with seals imprinted with their images, consecrate statues and there by long for permanence. One such urge of the erstwhile kings, conquerors and military generals is reflected in the statues they themselves got erected or their disciples got made to prove their allegiance to the authority. There are statues installed by democratic governments too, to celebrate an occasion or remember a person. The Statue of Liberty standing as guard at the entrance of New York Harbour on Liberty Island is a gift from France to commemorate the 100th year of signing of the Declaration of Independence of USA. A symbol of democracy, it's also a colossal neoclassical structure.

This well known statue has an inscription on its citadel, a sonnet written by Emma Lazarus (1849–1887), *The New Colossus*. Considered to be one of the finest pieces of sonnets in English literature, it compares the Statue of Liberty with the Colossus of Rhodes, one of the seven wonders of the Ancient World. The Colossus of Rhodes no longer stands. Constructed to celebrate the Rhode's victory over Cyprus, it was said to be around 33 meters (108 feet) high, almost the height of the present day Statue of Liberty. Erected by Charles of Lindos in 280 BC, it collapsed during an earthquake in 226 BC. Though it was never rebuilt, parts of it are preserved, as if questioning

the endeavours of men or their ideas of permanency!

But my Statue of Liberty, says Lazarus:

Not like the brazen giant of Greek Fame,

With conquering limbs astride from land to land;

Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand

A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame

Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name

Mother of Exiles.

Thus, Lazarus describes the Statue of Liberty as the mother of exiles, and as distinguishable from the Colossus of Rhodes. While Colossus of Rhodes stood for ancient Greek and Roman civilizations and for exhibition of power, authority and victory in war, the Statue of Liberty, says Lazarus, stands for compassion, an inviting Mother of Exiles!

“Keep, ancient lands, your storied Pomp!” cries she,

With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,

Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,

The wretched refuse of your teeming shore

Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,

I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

The question that lingers in the mind of any liberal today is: “Is she now the same personification of liberty that Lazarus so passionately

praised?” When the golden doors of the land that was one of the first to be colonised are shut to millions of immigrants and asylum seekers, exiles and destitute in the name of “America first”, and when walls are erected on the borders of the neighbouring States, is she the same Lady of Liberty who cried “Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!” and invited those tired, poor and huddled masses yearning to breathe free? Has Time erased the lustre of the claims of Lazarus? Or is it as history has demonstrated time and again—today's heroes are tomorrow's tyrants?

There are plenty of statues, and they stand higher and higher. The Sphinx and the Great Pyramid stand far taller than the Statue of Liberty. Competitive devotees clamour for taller, stronger, higher idols to consecrate their Gods, Kings and Gurus, owned or appropriated. Now the moderns are also in the race to surpass all that is tall in the world. The Sardar, one of the triumvirate of the freedom struggle with Gandhi and Nehru, now stands as the Statue of Unity, a new colossal, bigger than his mentor in the very land of the mentor, 182 meters high, on the river island constructed by a Multinational Company, with money coming from the much tainted public sectors, consuming about Rs 3,000 crore of a poor and developing India, looking down condescendingly or with consternation at his mentor and all his comrades-in-arms? Challenging many for the title of the tallest statue in the world, including the Spring Temple Buddha and the Father of the

Nation, he occupies now more than two hectares of land, which probably he might not have ever ventured to occupy while alive!

There is another statue, which also stood for power and authority, the statue of the Egyptian king Ozymandias. He was a villainous pharaoh who enslaved the ancient Hebrews who Moses led to the Exodus. **P. B. Shelley** (1792–1822), in his sonnet Ozymandias reveals the nature and state of statue.

*I met a traveler from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless
legs of stone
Stand in the desert . . . Near them,
on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies,
whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold
command,
Tell that its sculptor well those
passions read*

*Which yet survive, stamped on these
lifeless things,*

*The hand that mocked them and the
heart that fed;
And on the pedestal these words
appear:*

*'My name is Ozymandias, King of
Kings;
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and
despair!'*

*Nothing beside remains. Round the
decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless
and bare*

*The lone and level sands stretch far
away.*

Ozymandias, the ancient Egyptian King, now known as Ramesses II, regarded as the greatest and the most powerful Egyptian pharaoh, now stands as “two vast and trunkless legs of stone”, conveying

the ephemeral nature of human pursuits, with even civilisations themselves disappearing into a whisper. John Keats (1795–1821), a contemporary of Shelley, wrote a beautiful ode, Ode on a Grecian Urn, where he describes Time’s irrelevance to the physical and material, with a suggestion that it is art that is an anti-dote to this impermanence. The art on the Grecian Urn, a decorative pot from ancient Greece, survives the test of time. Empires, emperors, civilizations and cultures appear, and then disappear traceless into history, but the piece of art remains.

*Thou still unravish'd bride of
quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and
slow time,
. . .*

*What men or gods are these? What
maidens loth?*

*What mad pursuit? What struggle
to escape?*

*What pipes and timbrels! What wild
ecstasy?*

*. . .
When old age shall this generation
waste,*

*Thou shalt remain, in midst of other
woe*

*Than ours, a friend to man, to whom
thou say'st,
“Beauty is truth, truth beauty, —that
is all*

*Ye know on earth, and all ye need
to know.”*

We remember Sardar as one of the greatest of India’s freedom fighters, as a man with absolute integrity, honesty and sincerity, as the greatest follower of Gandhi, as the comrade-in-arms of Nehru and many other freedom fighters, as a satyagrahi of the highest order, as a man with an iron grit to unify

the nation, and as a man with great humility who spoke less and did more. He is one of the tallest figures of modern Indian history. His greatness is within and not without. Hugeness of his statue may not further the ideals of this great soul, instead it distances us from him. We want to remember Patel as one who, along with our Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, and Nehru constituted the triumvirate who led our freedom struggle to victory. The Indian freedom struggle is, probably, one of the best human struggles for freedom and liberation in the world history! We hope that the madness to ‘dislocate’ Patel within huge fortified structures does not disturb the serious student of India’s freedom struggle from appreciating and re-appreciating his contribution to the nation.

**Books by
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1. **Vikas Ka Rasta: Nai Arthik Neetiyon ka vishleshan..**Price 600 rupees.
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Mexico: President AMLO's Inaugural Speech Offers 'New Hope'

Martin Varese

After receiving the presidential sash in the Mexican National Congress on December 1, President Lopez Obrador gave a speech outlining an ambitious and encouraging government plan, based on bids to slash corruption, overturn neoliberalism and make important public investments.

AMLO started his speech by thanking outgoing President Enrique Peña Nieto: "Mainly I recognise the fact of him not having intervened, as did other presidents, in the last presidential elections."

AMLO had previously claimed that the last two presidential elections were stolen from him. It is a good thing that the Mexican authorities, especially "the acting president, respect the will of the people," he said.

"By mandate of the people, we begin today the fourth transformation of Mexico." AMLO wants to trigger a turning point in Mexican history that would be comparable to three other historic moments: Independence, a movement mainly led by Miguel Hidalgo, which liberated Mexico from around 300 years of Spanish domination; the Reform, a struggle between liberals and conservatives, which gave the "laws of the Reform" (one of the most important was the separation of the Church from the State, mainly protagonised by Benito Juarez); and the Mexican Revolution, a war to end the 30-year regime of Porfirio Diaz, after which the current Mexican Constitution was established.

AMLO has long talked about

the fourth transformation of Mexico, in which he aims to change the political regime. Saturday, he said, started a "peaceful and orderly transformation, but at the same time deep and radical because it will end corruption and impunity that prevent the rebirth of Mexico."

AMLO's narrative, from before being elected president, has had the fight against corruption as one of its central pillars. "The crisis in Mexico was originated not only by the failures of the neoliberal economic model applied during the last 36 years, but also by the predominance, during this period, of the most filthy corruption, both public and private." Nothing has damaged Mexico more than the corruption of the people governing the country, and that tiny minority that profits from influences and "lobby."

"Neoliberalism is corruption," he continued. "It sounds strong, but privatisation in Mexico has meant corruption." Economic management during the neoliberal period, from 1983–2018, "has been the most inefficient of Mexico's modern history." Adding to this, due to the concentration of wealth in a "few hands, the majority of the population has been impoverished."

President Lopez Obrador emphatically distanced himself from the 40 years of neoliberal politics that have led Mexico into unprecedented economic crisis. "I say it without ideology: neoliberal politics has been a disaster, a calamity for the public life of the country. For example, the energy reform they

said would come to save us has only caused the lesser production of oil and the excessive price increase of energy."

The energy reform, approved in 2013 by his predecessor Peña Nieto's government, translated into the gradual privatisation of oil in Mexico, the only country in Latin America that previously had full control of this natural resource, expropriated in 1938 by Lazaro Cardenas.

"Before neoliberalism, we produced and were self-sufficient in gas, diesel, energy. Now we buy more than half of what we use. In this period the purchasing power of salaries has been slashed by 60 percent," AMLO said, arguing that Mexico's minimum wage is among the lowest in the world.

Mexico, he continued, "is in 135th place for corruption out of 172 countries evaluated (by Transparency International), emphasising that corruption and neoliberalism have been interlaced in the country. During the neoliberal period, the whole system has operated for corruption. The political power and the economic power have nourished themselves mutually. The stealing of the goods of the people has been the *modus operandi*."

The solution? "If you ask me to express in one sentence the new government's plan: to end corruption and impunity," AMLO told the cheering audience. Highlighting the importance of achieving the separation of political and economic power, he said: "The state will stop

facilitating the pillage. It will stop being a committee for a rapacious minority. There cannot be a rich government with a poor people."

The new government won't focus on revenge or trying to capture everyone who's corrupt because "there wouldn't be enough courts and prisons," AMLO said, stressing that he will focus on preventing future crimes instead of prosecuting former state officials.

Speaking about "putting a full stop on this horrible page of history," AMLO was interrupted by the audience counting to 43 in reference to the 43 forcibly disappeared Ayotzinapa students. AMLO said abuses of power will be prosecuted and promised that he would never order the repression of the people, nor "will we cover up violations of human rights."

"The government will represent all Mexicans, there will be authentic rule of law . . . but we will give priority to those who are the most vulnerable," he said. He also stressed the importance of popular consultations during his government, in order to restore the power of the people and resurrect a "real democracy."

"Republican austerity and the fight against corruption will free enough resources for development. We will not need to increase taxes, and that is a commitment. The price of gasoline will not increase beyond inflation." Austerity is based on the elimination of "unnecessary expenses" of the state: "The salaries for those on top will be reduced because the salaries of those in the bottom will increase."

AMLO also proposed an increase in public investments to overturn neoliberal policies. The construction of at least two refineries

and the recovery of six others will reduce energy prices, he said.

For "the wellbeing of our people, the plan is to combat poverty and marginalisation as has never been done in history. Today, I formally present constitutional reforms to establish the welfare state and guarantee the right of the people to health, to education and social security." He promised to work for social justice and to reduce inequality based on public investment and providing help from the government to surpass "neoliberal hypocrisy. Those who are born poor will not be condemned to die poor."

"We won't give our backs to young people, and we won't insult them by not giving them opportunities to work and study," he said. Retirees and people with disabilities will also be afforded better opportunities and government assistance.

"We want migration to be optional, not compulsory. We are going to make Mexicans happy where they were born, where their families and roots are," AMLO said.

Subsidies will be given to farmers and to the people who produce well-being in Mexico, and also announced that "a basket containing basic foodstuffs to fight malnutrition and hunger will be sold at a fair price."

AMLO also announced the banning of "fracking and transgenic (foods)," in Mexico.

And he called for cooperation and collaboration with all the peoples of the world, based on self-determination. "Mexico will not stop thinking of Simon Bolivar and Jose Marti," and will start looking more and more towards Latin America, he said, stressing the importance of the region's integration.

AMLO concluded by saying that the national problems are big, but with the cultures and strength of the country's people Mexico can continue advancing.

"I'm optimistic. We are beginning and are on the road to the rebirth of Mexico. We will become a model country, by ending corruption. We will build a society that is more just, democratic, brotherly and always happy."

The only thing Mexico needs now is a good government, AMLO said, vowing that his administration will work to change the country in such a way that it becomes almost impossible to roll back any advances.

Footprints of A Crusader (The Life Story of Mrunal Gore)

by
Rohini Gawankar

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On International Human Rights Day

Vijay Prashad

Not often does good news come on International Human Rights Day—December 10. It is mostly a somber occasion, a day to reflect on the values of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) and a day to bemoan the gap between those values and our reality.

Little of the high-minded dreams have come to life. Hunger and war, desolation and alienation define our times as sharply as they did for those pioneers who wrote that text in the years after World War II. They had the Holocaust and the atomic bomb as their context.

It is worthwhile to point out that it was the Indian delegate—Hansa Mehta—who objected to the phrase “all men are born free and equal.” She insisted that it be changed to “all human beings are born free and equal.” Hansa Mehta was thinking of women when she made that alteration. She knew that the costs of war and hunger are borne so sharply by women. So did Minerva Bernardino (Dominican Republic) and Begum Shaista Ikramullah (Pakistan), both of whom made key interventions in that declaration.

This year, two important events took place on December 10. First, the nations of the world signed on a Global Compact for Migration. Second, the Nobel Peace Prize went to Nadia Murad and Denis Mukwege, both campaigners against sexual violence as a weapon of war. These are two events that drive forward the good side of history.

Migration

In Marrakesh, Morocco, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres hosted an important meeting on migration. The upshot of this meeting was a non-binding Global Compact for Migration that provides the basis for international cooperation on migration and makes the case for migrants to be treated with dignity.

The United Nations’ Special Representative for International Migration—Louise Arbour—greeted the Compact’s passage as a “wonderful occasion, really a historic moment.” Discussion over the Compact had been ongoing for the past 18 months, placed on the table by the deaths of thousands of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea and by the terrible reaction by Europe and the United States to the migrants.

There has been so little recognition that most migrants flee from war and economic collapse—conditions created by policies made by the governments of Europe and North America. The people who make the long journey across the Sahara Desert or along the length of Central America are survivors of trade policies and extractive industries that destroy their livelihoods and lives. A true global compact would abandon those policies. But we are far from that.

Louise Arbour noted that nothing really would come of this Compact unless the countries implemented

its initiatives. It is not likely that countries such as the United States will honour the Compact. Nonetheless, here is another piece of paper with multilateral agreement that one can wave under the nose of Trump and the other xenophobes. It is a red rag to the bull.

Sexual Violence in War

The horror of war is unimaginable. Those who have been to a battlefield know its terrors: the sounds, the smells, the casualness of the killing, the hunger, the uncertainty, the peril. In the shadows lurk terrors even graver, the “invisible war crime”—Binaifer Nowrojee said at Sierra Leone’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This is the crime of wartime sexual violence.

No doubt that this violence is old. But it is shocking nonetheless. Professor Claudia Card, in an article from 1996 on “Rape as a Weapon of War,” suggests that mass murder has many methods. One way is to kill people—by gunshot or by gas or by atomic bomb. Another, she says, “is to destroy a group’s identity by decimating cultural and social bonds.” Martial rape, she says, does both. It kills people and it kills the bonds of a community.

It was shocking to hear what ISIS did to the Yazidi community—the capture of women who were then forced to be sex slaves, the rape of thousands. It is what catapulted Nadia Murad to the headlines, her bravery moving her from being a survivor of horrific violence to being

a brave spokesperson for justice and against war. She accepted her Nobel Prize on Monday and said, “thank you very much for this honor, but the fact remains that the only prize in the world that can restore dignity is justice and the prosecution of criminals.”

What the Yazidis experienced is not uncommon elsewhere. Reading the Truth and Reconciliation documents from Sierra Leone or the reports from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Afghanistan is chilling. It is difficult to forget men like Mosquito, who raped a 19-year-old woman in Telu Bongor, Sierra Leone and then—according to the young woman—“ordered his men to continue the act.” “Even now,” she says, “the pain is with me.”

Denis Mukwege is from east Congo. He is a gynecologist who has watched his society be torn apart. War has been its condition for decades, war premised on the theft of raw materials that feed a world hungry for its digital goods (the mineral coltan is essential to capacitors). Mukwege’s Nobel Prize speech rattles. “Turning a blind eye to tragedy is being complicit,” he said. “It’s not just perpetrators of violence who are responsible for their crimes. It is also those who choose to look the other way.”

It is easy to be fascinated by the brutality of Mosquito, but what about the brutality of the system that produces Mosquito and the women he devastated? It is the victim, Mukwege said, who is valued less than the commercial goods that slip out of the Congo and are shipped from the ports of Mombasa, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, to factories far

afied. It is worth pointing out that the worker who mines for coltan or tantalum makes less than \$1 per day, while a kilo of tantalum is likely to fetch somewhere around \$200. Violence to control these mines is the author of rape.

Safety

The Global Compact for Migration is not so far from the question of sexual violence in war. I remember the attacks on Somali refugees in the camps in Kenya in 1993. The logic of the rapists was appalling—to punish the Somalis, to enjoy the spoils of war. What was there for the Somali women in the isolated camps in Kenya is now there for the Rohingya women as they flee rape by Myanmar’s military and as they struggle with the stigma of birthing children from the sexual violence. The echoes are loud and horrifying, reminders of the Pakistani soldiers raping women in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) as a weapon to break the confidence of the liberation struggle. There is an echo of the rape and murder of

14-year-old Abeer Qassim Hamza al-Janabi and her family by US soldiers in Yusufiyah, Iraq. There are loud echoes, loud screams for justice.

There is the echo from the Indian state of Manipur, where the soldiers of Assam Rifles raped and killed Thangjam Manorama—one more victim in a line of victims. She was raped multiple times, the autopsy showed, and was shot 16 times in her vagina. One day, fed up with the violence, 12 Manipuri women went out on the street, removed their clothes in front of Imphal’s Kangla Fort, where the army was headquartered, and shouted, “Indian Army, rape us, kill us.” One of the women—Soibom Momon Leima—later said, “They had their weapons. We only had our body.”

The 12 women of Manipur said that they had let out their “war cry.” Denis Mukwege said from the Nobel pulpit, “If there is a war to be waged, it is the war against the indifference which is eating away at our societies.” There is terrible indifference, silence.



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Why Extinction Rebellion Protesters Are Breaking the Law

Claire Wordley

“A 4°C future is incompatible with an organised global community,” climate and energy professor Kevin Anderson once told Grist.

Even if we cut emissions by 3.5 percent a year after 2020, we’ll hit 4 degrees Celsius warming by the end of this century. Just let that sink in for a minute. When babies born now are in their 80s, there could be no human civilisation left to speak of. The Amazon rainforest is likely to die at 3–4°C of warming. And the corals? They’ll be long gone, dying out at 2°C. Currently, perversely, terrifyingly, global emissions are still rising.

If that is what we are facing, why are we all carrying on as normal? Well, some people aren’t. Extinction Rebellion is a UK-born group committing civil disobedience to protest catastrophic climate breakdown and species extinctions. Springing apparently from nowhere, in November 2018 the group mobilised thousands of people to block bridges, roads, and government departments in London—trying to cause enough disruption to make the British government act on climate. Extinction Rebellion demands that the UK government declare a climate emergency, that the UK go carbon neutral by 2025, and that the decisions on how to go carbon neutral are taken by a citizen’s assembly.

With their use of stark hourglass and human skull imagery, their emotive wording, strong demands, and tactics of civil disobedience, Extinction Rebellion activists have raised hackles in many quarters. Here

I explore some of the reasons why this group has taken the approach it has, and assess some of the criticism it has faced.

Criticism: *They’ve picked the wrong target! The UK government is doing excellent work to stop climate change.*

First, while this protest is starting in the UK—home of the Industrial Revolution, for those that like symbolism—this movement is growing worldwide. So far chapters have been set up in Germany, Scotland, Ireland, Denmark, Belgium, Sweden, Spain, Colombia, Tasmania, France, and the USA, and more are sprouting up every day.

Second, the body advising the UK government on climate breakdown is clear that unless huge changes are made, the government will miss its own legally binding targets. Yet the government is approving new runways, encouraging domestic flights (in a small country well served by rail), and allowing hydraulic fracturing (fracking) for gas despite public protests; while simultaneously scrapping subsidies for renewables, cancelling funding to develop carbon capture schemes, and rejecting plans for a tidal lagoon generator as “too expensive.”

Third, the UK government’s own legally binding targets on emissions won’t keep it in line with the Paris Agreement, where nations agreed to keep “well below” 2°C of warming, and ideally under 1.5°C. This led to a legal challenge against the UK government by Plan B and eleven British citizens, who argued that the UK was in breach of its

own international obligations. It is still unclear whether the case will be heard.

And finally, there’s the moral argument. The UK has been pumping greenhouse gases into the air for a very, very long time—the accumulated impacts of which are huge (remember the industrial revolution was born here). Nations industrialising today need help to decarbonise, but as a rich, developed nation, the UK has a “carbon debt” to repay to the world for its past emissions. Taken together, it seems to me that my government is a very fair target to protest against.

Criticism: *Extinction Rebellion’s 2025 target is an unrealistic timeframe for the UK to aim for carbon neutrality.*

Firstly, it’s hard to tell what is realistic or not; a lot of that depends on political will. But while 2025 is very close, Extinction Rebellion activists are not the only ones with big ambitions. Norway is aiming for carbon neutrality by 2030, Costa Rica by 2021. Even Ethiopia has ambitions to be carbon neutral by 2025. These countries may or may not make it, and these targets don’t appear to include imports—but if they try hard enough, these nations are likely to make significant advances in cutting emissions.

The UK and other countries made huge changes during World War Two, when everyone was asked to “do their bit” to save the country. Think of the “Dig for Victory” campaign that got people digging up their gardens to grow vegetables, the rationing, the push

for factories to start building planes and tanks, the farmers who became fighter pilots, and the housewives who became farmers and factory workers. Imagine if we had a push now showing people that to keep their kids safe they should start growing more of their own food and eating less meat; imagine if World War Two-levels of effort were invested in renewable energy, in making public transport better, in swapping petrol pumps for electric car charging stations, in covering rooftops with solar panels. Huge changes are needed, but people have made huge changes before, and what we face now is much scarier than World War Two.

The will of the people to tackle climate breakdown is also greater than politicians might think. A 2017 survey of over 8,000 people in eight countries found that 84 percent agree to at least some extent that climate change is a “global catastrophic risk,” and almost 90 percent agree that we should probably or definitely take climate action “even if it requires making considerable changes that impact on our current living standards.” But people are unlikely and often unable to do it alone—they need a solid green infrastructure that makes behavior-change possible.

Bristol City Council in the UK recently voted to declare a climate emergency and to make the city carbon neutral by 2030—and used the rise of Extinction Rebellion as a sign that people were ready. The district of Stroud quickly followed suit. While the UK target is 80 percent domestic emissions cuts by 2050, in these cities the framing is getting closer to that of Extinction Rebellion. The UK government is currently asking the Committee on

Climate Change whether it needs tougher targets—sufficient public pressure could make zero carbon by 2025 the option everyone is talking about.

Criticism: *Why do you need to commit civil disobedience? Just have a march!*

Since the declaration of scientific consensus that humans were causing global warming in 1988, there has been a huge array of tactics used to try and get emissions cut. Scientists have produced report after report and citizens have signed petitions, held marches, and even taken legal action against their governments. Yet emissions have continued to rise. While people working to limit climate breakdown have gone through the “proper” channels, lobbyists for fossil fuel companies are less principled. They have directly lobbied governments (the UK department responsible for energy and climate change met with fracking companies 30 times in 3 years; it never met any anti-fracking campaigners who tried to talk). They have funded think-tanks that spread misinformation on the climate emergency, they have muted concerns about the emerging crisis through media outlets, they have sat hand-in-glove with governments and refused to change their ways even as the biosphere crumbles. They have even been complicit in the execution of their critics. And so, along with complicit governments, they have convinced people to carry on as normal.

Those protesting against fossil fuels do not have the same money and lobbying power, so rely on grassroots organising. Marches agreed to in advance by governments have not had sufficient impact. Civil disobedience aims to disrupt: to

disrupt economic activity, drawing the media and the governments’ attention, and to disrupt normality, to try and show other citizens that things are not OK. Humans are herd animals; if we see people rushing for the exit, we’ll follow. We can’t rush for the exit to planet Earth, but we can try to create a crisis atmosphere that may engage others to act. Civil disobedience requires remarkably few people to be effective; even just 3.5 percent of the population engaged in sustained non-violent resistance can topple brutal dictators.

Civil disobedience for the climate is taking off across the world, especially among the very young, who cannot vote yet but who will be worst affected by the climate crisis. The Sunrise Movement and the Youth Rising movements are “sitting in” and refusing to leave seats of power in the USA and Canada. In the USA, they seem to be having some influence in pressuring Democrats to draw up a “Green New Deal.” Inspired by 15-year-old activist Greta Thunberg, thousands of brave and switched-on children are committing civil disobedience by going on strike from school in Sweden and Australia, and clearly scaring their politicians. Imagine if more of us walked out from school, from university, from work, from whatever we are expected to do, demanding climate action.

Imagine cities brought to a standstill. This is part of what Extinction Rebellion hopes to achieve in its International Day of Rebellion in April 2019. If the prospect of a 4-degree world won’t make you take action, what will?

Criticism: The Extinction Rebellion messaging is not very optimistic.

Extinction Rebellion's messaging and imagery has been stark, even brutal. Hourglass symbols remind us that time is running out, human skulls tell us that people will suffer with climate breakdown, and the black capital letters on their banners spell out bleak messages. CLIMATE CHANGE = MASS MURDER. SAVE OUR CHILDREN. ACT

NOW. Research from a range of behavioral campaigns shows that we need to evoke fear, anger, hope, and courage to motivate mass movements for a safer global future.

Ultimately, the success or otherwise of Extinction Rebellion's messaging will lie in the amount of people it can mobilise, and the actions that governments take directly or indirectly as a result of

mass civil protest. So far, Extinction Rebellion has managed to motivate thousands of people in the UK in a short amount of time, and inspired the set-up of other chapters across the world. This suggests that its message has resonated with many people. But this is only the beginning—it's over to you now.

In 30 years time, what will you say you did for the climate?

The Yellow Vest Movement Strengthens in France

John Mullen

It is hard to count demonstrators spread out across thousands of mobilisations, but it seems that over half a million people were involved in "Act Four" of the Yellow Vest mobilisation in France on Saturday 8 December. In Bordeaux, a huge joint demonstration between university students and Yellow Vests chanted: "Students and Yellow Vests, same Macron, same struggle!" In Toulouse, Lyon, Saint Etienne, Marseilles, Dieppe and dozens of other towns many thousands marched. Even in smaller places like Albi or Auch there was a fine Yellow Vests demonstration.

A lively picket was organised in front of the factory in Sarthe which makes tear gas grenades. At Saint-Avold in the East of France a replica of a guillotine was placed at a major roundabout. A few days earlier in the port of Saint Nazaire in Brittany, demonstrators repainted the banks of the town in bright yellow, while a cake shop owner in the South started selling special lemon eclairs in the form of a Yellow Vest protester!

A people's movement like this can never stand still: it has to keep

rising or it will quickly decline. People make sacrifices to go out and occupy the roundabouts and motorway toll booths, they find the time and money to go to Paris or to the regional capital for the Saturday demonstration, and they live the stressful life of activism. But they want results. Although the togetherness and the dignity of resistance are important to people, unless some progress is seen each week, the temptation to go home, watch TV and repaint your bathroom instead will tend to win out.

A Rising Movement

This last week, there was none of that—there has been tremendous progress. First, hundreds of high schools have been blockaded by the students, and demonstrations organised in Paris, Lille, Marseilles and elsewhere. This new mobilisation is inspired by the Yellow Vests, but based on specific demands of the young people—against recent reforms making it harder to get into university, and against the government decision to make foreign students pay around 3,000

euros a year tuition fees (as against around 300 at the moment).

In several universities—Rennes Toulouse and Paris Nanterre among others—mass meetings of thousands have voted to blockade their universities and join the Yellow Vest movement. Dozens of motorway toll booths are still occupied by Yellow Vests letting cars through free, and road blocks are functioning at supermarkets and roundabouts: serious effects on weekend commerce are visible. At least one supermarket has closed due to lack of supplies.

Now, energy strikes have been announced for this week, some teaching unions are calling for strikes, and an influential small farmers movement has called on people to join the revolt. On 8 December, climate marches in many cities (Paris, Amiens, Nantes) were joined by Yellow Vest people, helping to put to rest the lie that Macron's fuel taxes were somehow green, when in fact he is closing down thousands of kilometres of railway and refuses to make the big oil companies pay their taxes.

In Paris, hospital workers fighting for jobs also joined the Yellow Vests, while ongoing strikes in steel and in oil depots add to the atmosphere of generalised revolt. There are many other developments, but suffice it to say this is still a rising movement.

Macron and his government have responded in three ways: repression, propaganda and concessions. None have been successful: the movement is still on the up and public opinion remains solidly with the Yellow Vests. On 5 December, polls gave 66 percent “support or sympathise” with the movement, against 24 percent “opposed or hostile”.

A month ago, these figures were 71 percent and 11 percent respectively. In smaller towns, support is stronger; age makes little difference to levels of support, and among manual workers rates of approval are extremely high (78 percent support or sympathise). And this was one of the polls least favourable to our side. Other polls show that 50 percent of the population want Macron to resign. You can feel something in the air. The lady who cleans the stairwell in our block of flats proudly displayed yellow vests on the two seat backs of her car.

Repression, Propaganda and Minor Concessions

After a couple of dozen bank branches and a few shops were smashed up in Paris on 1 December, the government decided to put into action a Project Fear at a level not seen in France these last 35 years. The presidential spokesperson claimed (without any evidence) that a “hard core of several thousand people” were heading for Paris at the weekend “to smash and to kill”.

The Eiffel Tower, the Louvre, all the high schools in Paris and a number of other institutions were closed for the day.

The huge department stores stopped work too, costing them tens of millions of euros in pre-Christmas sales. Twelve shiny armoured vehicles were trundled out along with fanfares and serious-faced TV commentators reflected all day long on “how the worst can be avoided” (although sending in the army was ruled out at the last moment).

The reason for Project Fear was partly so that the more vicious of the police chiefs and police sections understood that, whatever happened, they would be covered by the state power.

This has had its effect already. Countless videos of teenage demonstrators being thumped, kicked and beaten with batons are circulating on social media. Several high school students have been seriously injured, some permanently disfigured by flashballs or teargas canisters. Young people were kept in the cells for 36 hours because they had scrawled graffiti on walls.

One anonymous riot policeman told a journalist that for the first time in his career he had received the (illegal) order to aim tear gas grenades directly at demonstrators rather than above their heads. An 80-year-old Arab lady in Marseilles died on the operating table after she was hit by a tear gas grenade while closing her shutters: it seems the police had aimed at the woman deliberately. Two clearly identified photographers from the *Le Parisien* newspaper were hit with flashballs, and in several big towns, demonstrators were seriously injured. 1,700 people were arrested

across France on 8 December.

And then there was that video, which has gone viral, of the dozens of schoolchildren in Mantes-la-Jolie forced to kneel with their hands on their heads, like in a police state. The general reaction among the population was deep shock. Colleagues who never talk politics brought up the subject spontaneously at work. Parents’ organisations are making official complaints and Communist regional councillors and trade unions offered to organise protection for high school student demonstrations.

Over the last 30 years, police violence against demonstrators in France has been getting worse (as previous generations of high school activists can witness). The present clear intensification is meant to warn us that the state power is ready to go much further in future as its desperate fight to prop up the dictatorship of profit goes on.

Along with Project Fear, the state’s public relations experts, who have been working overtime, have come up with some other wizard wheezes. A small right wing breakaway from the Yellow Vests, which has practically no influence (called the “free Yellow Vests”) is interviewed day and night on the TV news bulletins. Riot police are interviewed anonymously, speaking of how they are terrified to go to the demonstrations and fear for their lives. And some of the media continue to claim that the movement is in the hands of the far right and Macron is the only defence against fascism.

In fact, as Yellow Vests joined the climate marches on 8 December (notably in Toulouse and Paris) and the demand for a rise in the minimum wage became

more prominent, Marine Le Pen's influence is slowly waning, since she is radically opposed to progressive action on either of these issues. In the Paris area, calls by Black activist organisations to join the Yellow Vest demos (with their own slogans against racist police violence) have also helped clarify the fundamental political nature of the movement.

Macron Trying Not to Back Down

Macron really did not want to cancel the fuel tax rise planned for January, because his reputation of never backing down is at the centre of his strategy. Nevertheless, his prime minister, Edouard Philippe announced on 4 December that the rise had been suspended. The decision was universally condemned as far too little far too late, and the very next day, Macron himself decided to announce the rise was scrapped not suspended. The episode was seen as a sign of tension between Macron and Edouard Philippe, and rumours that Macron will fire his prime minister are being heard. The episode of the wealth tax similarly showed confusion. One of Macron's ministers suggested on Wednesday that a recently abolished wealth tax might be brought back in. Macron corrected her publicly within hours.

Macron is fishing around for other concessions which they can make which will divide the movement without costing too much. A suggestion that employers in the private sector will be encouraged by tax breaks to give a cash bonus of up to 1,000 euros to their workers this year is one idea we are hearing. In officially unrelated areas, concessions are occasionally being found to head off the spread of the movement. Four hundred million euros for hospitals which

could not be found for many months was suddenly discovered by Agnès Buzyn, the minister of health.

Union Leaders

Though local and regional trade union organisations often support the Yellow Vest movement, national leaderships are worse than contradictory. I am no fan of excessive rhetoric, but it is hard to avoid the word "treacherous" when you speak of last Thursday's press release, co-signed by all the national trade union confederations except one.

It denounced the violence of demonstrators, but did not mention police violence. It declared that the unions were keen to negotiate at any time with the government, and it neither called on people to join the Yellow Vest protests nor expressed wishes for their success. Since this movement does not have an established leadership, it is hard for professional negotiators to try to close the movement down with complex but minor concessions (as often happens with strike waves), but the trade union bureaucracy seems desperate for a chance to do so.

In Thursday's statement, the dreadful role of the trade union bureaucracy is laid out in all its horror. National trade union leaders in France earn only a fraction of the bloated salaries of British trade union leaders, but their position as professional negotiators still leads them to aim at calming any revolt. The seriousness of the crisis and the mass support for the movement would have justified a call for a one-day general strike—there would have been nothing utopian about such a call—and the union leaders' action shows the dire need

for alternative leadership within the working class.

Left trade union confederations like the powerful CGT, however, have contradictory positions. As well as signing the joint statement, the national CGT leadership brought out another press release two hours later denouncing police violence and calling for a large rise in the minimum wage, and their leader Philippe Martinez recently declared that the CGT's job was to get everyone out on strike. Locally, trade unions have offered to organise protection for yellow vest demos against the police, and regional federations of the CGT have often taken a very radical line. The CGT has called for strike action nationally for 14 December.

The Radical Left

Radical and anti-capitalist socialist and left organisations have become more fully involved this week. In parliament, Mélenchon, president of the France Insoumise group of MPs (a group that believes in Democratic Socialism), made an impressive speech praising the Yellow Vest movement and predicting that the present government is on its way out. He is worth quoting:

"These are happy days we are living through, because at last France is in general rebellion against an unjust order which has survived for far too long. We have millions of people whom life had made invisible, in metropolitan France and in the overseas territories, and now these millions, the people, are moving onto the stage of the History of France. As an irony of history, this yellow vest has become in a way the new Phrygian bonnet of the French, who are abandoning resignation

and isolation, who are abandoning the idea of continuing with harsh suffering in dignified silence.”

Act Five

It is already a fine victory for our side that a mass of previously unpoliticised people have moved into action, and that a new generation of high school students have become involved in a struggle to change their lives. These are experiences which will help form the political and psychological forces which will be needed in future battles.

Understandably, some commentators have got a little carried away. France is not on the edge of a revolutionary situation or of a civil war. But the movement is on the rise, and very determined. One Parisian riot policeman who was interviewed complained “people used to be afraid of us, but they aren’t any more. They’re aiming at us, because we’re symbols of the state”.

It is crucial that we make the state’s leaders regret what was done to the schoolkids at Mantes-la-Jolie, and if we do, there is plenty of hope for radical social change.

Letters to Editor

Improve Wages and Working Conditions of Mid-Day Meal Cooks

Bharat Dogra

Several hundred thousand women are employed in cooking mid-day meals in our schools. At present the wage of a mid-day meal cook is a low Rs 1,250 per month or about Rs 41 per day. There should be a campaign to raise this wage. The mid-day meal worker cleans the kitchen, sometimes he/she is also asked to sweep other rooms as well, then an average MDM worker cooks for 50 to 100 children, cleans utensils and again cleans the kitchen before leaving. It is more or less a full-time job of great responsibility, and a wage of Rs 41 per day is just too inadequate.

Keeping in view the fact that mid-day meal cooks have an almost full working day job which requires continuous work of great responsibility, they should get the legal minimum wage. There should be adequate provisions in the budget for this. As an immediate step, the existing wage should at least be doubled.

Improving the mid-day-meal kitchen should be included in the wider sanitation programme as, if meal is not cooked in conditions of good sanitation, health of children will be adversely affected. A few model kitchens can be prepared, with many improvements from hygiene point of view, and authorities should be motivated to introduce these improvements in other areas. Cooks who adopt hygiene practices should be honoured to encourage them.

Obituary: K. P. Srivastva (1926 – 6 Nov. 2018)

Qurban Ali

Veteran journalist and freedom fighter K.P. Srivastva passed away on 6 November 2018 after a long illness, at his home in New Delhi. He was 93. During his student days in Lucknow University, he came in contact with leaders of the Congress Socialist Party, especially its tallest leaders, Acharya Narendra Deva, Jayaprakash Narayan and Rammanohar Lohia, and became a socialist ideologically. As a student, he was imprisoned during the Quit India Movement of 1942.

He started journalism in 1942, the year of the Quit India Movement at a very tender age, and joined API, the Indian subsidiary of Reuters, which became the PTI in 1949. He rose to become an editor and retired in the late eighties.

K.P. Srivastva was President of the Press Association, Member of Parliament’s Press Gallery Committee and the Press Accreditation Committee of the Government of India. He is survived by his only daughter Indu Srivastava.

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Hind Mazdoor Sabha

Qurban Ali

In December 2018, HMS completes seventy years since its foundation in Calcutta in the newly independent India in 1948. Of course for the labour movement, seven decades are not too long a way and in that sense HMS has miles to go still. However, it is a matter of accomplishment for a national trade union center to have survived and grown without being a part of the political parties in a country like India where virtually every other central trade union organization is part of some political party or the other. From about 6 lakhs membership in 1948 to over 92 lakhs now and still growing, is no mean achievement. But the times ahead are tough. As it is, nearly 90% of the workforce in the country is unorganized, working in low paid, over worked jobs in dismal working conditions. As we move ahead, we need to stop and think - how do we build upon what we have? How do we face the challenges of the 21st century?

India, as we know, is undergoing significant politico-economic changes, led by the forces of economic liberalisation and globalisation. These changes are posing serious challenges to the trade union movement. At stake are hard won trade union rights of the workers. The role of State in India is undergoing major changes. What then should be the role of trade unions in this changing scenario? The time has come to sift from experience and draw from it the lessons for the future. This process needs to begin from looking back at the history of our own organisation, factors responsible for its growth

as well as our misjudgments that prevented us from growing as much as we should have. Most importantly, to assess how far the organisation has been able to follow up on its goals and the ideals for which it was established.

The birth of HMS:

It may be remembered that in 1947-48, apart from M. N. Roy inspired independent Indian Federation of Labour (IFL), there were two main central trade unions - the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) which was under the control of the Communist Party of India and the newly formed Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) which was set up at the behest of Congress nationalists and the Gandhians of Hindustan MazdoorSewakSangh in the Indian National Congress, the ruling Party. The Socialists in the Congress who broke away from Congress party in 1948, formed Hind MazdoorPanchayat (HMP).

This was a period of much turmoil as well as many hopes for the future of free India. This post 2nd World War period in India was marked by acute shortages, rising prices and spiraling unemployment. There was much turbulence in the industrial relations scene as workers were facing many hardships. As many as 16 million mandays were lost due to strikes in 1947 as discontent among the workers grew. The response of the two major central trade unions -AITUC and INTUC- was not acceptable to the socialists at that time. Mere militancy dictated by the needs of the communist party (as reflected by AITUC at that time)

or sub-servience to the government (as reflected by INTUC) was not meeting the needs of the workers. The socialists felt that the trade union movement could not be tied down to the needs of the political parties but must follow policies only in the interests of the Indian workers. This necessitated both cooperation with the development efforts of the country as also constructive opposition to the anti-labour, anti-employment policies of the government and the employers. This thinking led to the formation of Hind MazdoorSabha (HMS).

HMS was founded in Calcutta during the trade union conference from 24th to 26th December 1948. The conference was attended by the representatives of Indian Federation of Labour (IFL, founded in 1941), Hind MazdoorPanchayat (HMP, founded in mid 1948), unions from the Forward Block (Party set up by Sh. Subhash Chandra Bose) and leading independent trade unions at that time. Over 600 trade union leaders participated, representing 427 unions and a membership of over 600000 workers. There were leaders like Jay Prakash Narayan, Sibnath Banerjee, R.A. Khedgikar and Ms. Maniben Kara who represented the railway unions; Shri Dalvi and ShRamanujam attended on behalf of Post & Telegraph employees; Miners were represented by Basawan Singh and P.B. Sinha while Textile workers were represented by R.S. Ruikar, Anthony Pillai and P.S. Chinnadurai. There were also representatives of Government employees, Teachers, Commercial employees, Port & Docks, Printing & Paper, Tobacco, Plantations and Sugar. Although

HMS as an organisation was new, the men and women who founded it were veterans of the Indian trade union movement, most of who had been instrumental in the formation and growth of AITUC earlier. The Founding Conference elected Com. R.S. Ruikar as the first President, Com. Ashok Mehta as the General Secretary and Com. G.G. Mehta and V.S. Mathur as Secretaries. Ms. Maniben Kara and Com. T.S. Ramanujam were elected as Vice-Presidents of HMS and Com. R.A. Khedgikar as the Treasurer.

The members of the Working Committee included veteran leaders like - Jayaprakash Narayan, V.G. Dalvi, Ms. ArunaAsaf Ali, V.B. Karnik, Dinkar Desai, N.V. Phadke, M.V. Donde, Rajani Mukherjee, Haren Ghosh, Anthoni Pillai, P.S. Chinnadurai, Peter Alwares, A.M. Williams, Munshi Ahmed Din, Vinayak Kulkarni, Nibran Ch. Bora and Basawan Singh.

The formation of HMS represented the emergence of a new force in Indian trade union movement - that of unionists who believed in free, independent and democratic trade unionism. It represented independence of trade unions from the control of Government, Employers and Political Parties. It also represented a new thinking that role of trade unions is not only to oppose anti-labour policies of the government and employers but also to play a positive role in the development of industry to share gains from growth and of preparing & training workers to discharge their responsibilities as citizens (see HMS Manifesto for details).

The Early Years (1948 - 1956)

The history of HMS reflects the politico-socio-economic currents in the country and the reactions

of the different union leaders and constituent unions to these developments. Although HMS is philosophically and organizationally independent of the political parties, the diversity of political opinion often caused conflicts and pulls and pressures from different sides (especially from the Socialist and the Congress party), shaping in the process the history of HMS. In the 1950s, it was the developments (splits) in the Socialist Party that always had repercussions on HMS.

The decision of the Socialist Party in 1949 at the Patna Conference to widen its base and open its membership to different people and organizations which had faith in socialist principles and peaceful and democratic means for achieving the goals (democratic socialism) was not acceptable to a group led by Mrs. ArunaAsaf Ali, who left the party in 1951 and later joined the Communist Party.

The membership fell in 1952 not only because some leaders like Mrs. ArunaAsaf Ali and Com. B.D. Joshi left HMS to join Communist Party, taking away some of their unions to AITUC but also due to organizational overhaul. In 1952, HMS decided for organizational reasons to do away with those unions which were not functional in active sense and were not paying their membership dues to HMS. The unity of Socialists under Praja Socialist Party (PSP) in September 1952 however boosted HMS which improved its effectiveness in the trade union field. Within HMS, five unions of transport and dock workers in Bombay came together in January 1954, to form Transport and Dock Workers Union, Bombay, under the leadership of Com. P.D' Mello, which greatly expanded HMS organization and influence in the Port industry. HMS was also

represented in the Textile Working party and the Coal Working party in 1951, which were set up by Sh. GulzariLalNanda, the Minister for Labour and Rehabilitation - a very sincere man who genuinely wanted the well being of the workers and commanded much respect of the union leaders.

Major Struggles and Strikes:

During the 1950s, HMS faced a number of struggles and carried out many nationwide campaigns. Important among these are -

- * 1950 Textile Strike in Bombay, headed by Mill Mazdoor Sabha (MMS), over the issue of Bonus and collective bargaining rights of MMS and recognition through secret ballot. The strike involved over 200000 workers and lasted for 63 days leading to the acceptance of payment of bonus as deferred wage.
- * In 1952, HMS carried out a country wide campaign against the Labour Relations Bill and the Trade Unions Bill, both of which sought to impose unjustified curbs on trade unions and its activities. The whole of the trade union movement was against these black labour laws, which were finally dropped by the government.
- * 1954 Strike of Lodna Colliery workers in Jharia Coal fields in Bihar, over the issue of reinstatement of 250 workers as per the terms of agreement reached earlier and of recognition of HMS union. Over 7000 workers participated in the strike led by Com. Mahesh Desai, General Secretary of KoylaMazdoorPanchayat. Com. Mahesh Desai had to face murder trial concocted by the authorities in collusion with the Employers but the charges

were dropped after about 3 years under sustained campaign of HMS and its unions in a campaign led by Jayaprakash Narayan.

- * 116 days strike of 4000 sugar workers of Tilaknagar in Maharashtra led by Com. G.G. Mehta, the General Secretary of HMS at that time. HMS won four & half months Bonus and reinstatement in jobs of 600 workers.

Some of the other major strikes/struggles during this period were:

- December 1957 strike of 4000 workers of India Security Press, Nasik in Maharashtra, led by Com. R.A. Khedgikar for improvements in service and working conditions;
- 110 day strike from 11th April to 29th July 1958 of the workers of Premier Automobiles Ltd. in Bombay involving about 5000 workers, led by HMS affiliate Engineering Mazdoor Sabha over the issue of collective bargaining rights of the union. Management did not respect the code of discipline agreed to in the tripartite committee. Strike was withdrawn only after Sh. Gulzarilal Nanda, Union Labour Minister intervened.
- Strike of about 2000 workers of the Coastal Shipping Companies in January, 1959 over dismissals and recruitment practices of the companies;
- Strike of Port & Dock workers on 16th June, 1958 in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Cochin, led by All India Port & Dock Workers Federation. Six workers died in Madras due to police firing. Strike called off after the Transport Minister assured to implement the Chaudhari

Committee Report.

Other major strikes during this period led by HMS were the strike of Buckingham & Carnatic Mills at Madras and Municipal workers strike led by Municipal Mazdoor Union in Bombay.

All of these strikes were conducted in disciplined and peaceful manner. In many other industries too strikes and protests were launched over the issue of non-recognition of and non bargaining with the HMS unions by the government or the employers who often favoured INTUC unions (such as in Premier Automobiles, Bikaner Gypsum Co., Orient Paper Mills in Orissa, Kirloskar Oil Engines Pune, Indian General Navigation & Railway Co. Calcutta, Bharat Sugar Mill, Bihar, etc). This was in breach of the Code of Discipline agreed to in the 16th ILC session.

In 1963, HMS Union in the Port & Dock of Goa succeeded after a bitter struggle and many arrests to end the Mukadam system of recruitment in Goa Docks.

At the same time Dock Workers Regulation of Employment Scheme came into effect due to the efforts of Transport & Dock Workers Union, Bombay. As a result workers were regularised and the Mukadam system was abolished.

1974 Railway Strike:

The Indian Railwaymen went on strike from 8th to 28th May 1974. HMS had heavy stakes in this strike since the zonal unions of western, northern and central railways were HMS affiliates. The main demands of the railway employees were that they should be considered as industrial workers, that their wages should be fixed in the same way as those of other industrial workers and as industrial workers, railway

employees should also be entitled to bonus. The strike was led by All India Railwaymen Federation, along with other railway unions all of which had been united for this struggle.

On 2nd May 1974, the day the negotiations were to start between AIRF leadership and the Railway Minister Mr. L.N. Misra, the authorities arrested AIRF President Mr. George Fernandes and his colleagues in Lucknow in the early dawn operations. The labour Minister appeared to be very ineffective during this period. This gave very clear indications that the Government was not interested in any negotiations, even when the all India Railway strike began on 8th May. HMS also took up the matter in the Asian Regional Organisation of ICFTU which extended support and sent a message to the Government of India requesting it to release the trade union leaders, start negotiations and stop victimisation of workers.

Victimisation of railway workers during the 1974 strike was quite ruthless- 46000 were dismissed, 9000 were suspended, 19000 were arrested and out of over 12 lakhs who participated in strike, 863000 employees suffered from break in service. Earlier on the eve of the strike, AITUC had also floated a new Railway Federation which later on at the instance of AITUC merged with AIRF. INTUC as usual played the role of opposing the strike. The growing economic crisis fuelled much discontent in the working class and students which led to Government imposing the infamous Emergency on 26th June 1975.

While the trade unions have played an important role in India's economic, social and political development over the last 50 years, the economic liberalisation and

Turned Out You Were Just Like Us

Fahmida Riaz

(Pakistani poet, human-rights activist and feminist, Fahmida Riaz, passed away at the age of 72 on November 22, 2018. We are publishing below the English translation of one of her oft-quoted nazms, "Tum bilkul hum jaise nikle".)

So it turned out you were just like us!
Where were you hiding all this time,
buddy?

That stupidity, that ignorance
we wallowed in for a century
Look, it arrived at your shores too!
Many congratulations to you!
Raising the flag of religion,
I guess now you'll be setting up
Hindu Raj?

You too will commence to muddle
everything up

You, too, will ravage your beautiful
garden.

You, too, will sit and ponder,
I can tell preparations are afoot,
Who is truly Hindu, who is not.
I guess you'll be passing fatwas
soon!

There, too, it will become hard to
survive.

There, too, you will sweat and bleed.
You'll barely make do joylessly.

You will gasp for air like us.
I used to wonder with such deep
sorrow,

And now, I laugh at the idea,
It turned out you were just like us!

We weren't two nations after all!
To hell with education and learning

Let's sing the praises of ignorance
Don't look at the potholes in your
path

Bring back instead the times of yore!
Practice harder till you master

the skill of always walking
backwards.

Let not a single thought of the
present

break your focus upon the past!
Repeat the same thing over and over

over and over,

Say only this:

How glorious was India in the past!

How sublime was India in days
gone by!

Then, dear friends, you will arrive
in heaven after all.

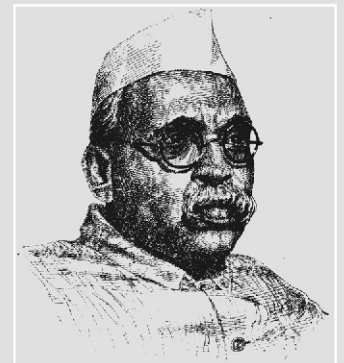
Yep. We've been there for a while
now.

Once you are there,

Once you're in the same hell-hole,
Keep in touch and tell us how it

goes!

**Acharya Javadekar
A Satyagrahi Socialist**



G. P. Pradhan

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globalisation policies at the turn of
century have posed a number of new
challenges before the Indian trade
union movement. Mere opposition
to change will not help; Trade
Union movement in India needs to
strengthen and expand its coverage
in times ahead. It is of paramount
importance to strengthen the Indian
trade union movement through -

- * forging Trade Union Unity,
- * expanding into unorganised
sectors,
- * improving trade union
communications,
- * increasing the information
collection activities, and
- * expansion of Education and
Training activities,
- * extending into new services
for the membership such as
social insurance, which the
unions are well placed to offer,
if only they could become more
professional;

It is time to reflect and take
stock. Trade union movement needs
to realise that workers interests
cannot be safeguarded by being
divided along political party lines. At
present in India, there is no political
party that stands for the policies that
will protect workers employment
and income rights, despite promises
to do so. In recent years we have
had the experience of governments
of all hues from left to right, all of
which have treaded the same path on
the economic policies front, while
doing nothing much to address the
workers genuine needs. It is our
house divided state of affairs in the
trade union movement that permits
this liberty to the political parties,
even the so called socialist parties.

In the 21st century India, if trade
Unions have to remain relevant
and strong enough to influence the
country s destiny, then there is no
alternative but to unite.



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New GDP Series and Its Assumptions

Arun Kumar

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Survey: 35 Lakh Jobs Lost in 4.5 Years

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As Raghunathan said, the survey

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

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

Courtesy: Newslick

Young Women in Chile Spur Widespread Revolt

Muffy Sunde, Freedom Socialist Party, USA / Europe

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

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

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

there was uproar over Pope Francis’ visit.

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

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

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

In 2011, one year of college

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

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

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

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

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

When sexual harassment charges

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

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

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

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

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

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

#MeToo

Wilderness Sarchild

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

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

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

The Yellow Vest Movement

Prabhat Patnaik

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

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

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

to which neoliberalism has pushed the working masses.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Naseeruddin Shah ko Gussa Kyon Aata hai?

Ram Puniyani

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

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

has come to power at the center.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Assembly Verdict: BJP is Biggest Loser

Subodh Varma

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

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

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

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

independent/small party MLAs is anybody's guess.

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

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

Reaction Against Disastrous Economic Policies

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It's Also A Defeat of Communal Propaganda and Violence

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

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

Dalit and Adivasi Anger at BJP

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

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

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

Building Productive Workers' Army in Venezuela

Cira Pascual Marquina

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Historically in Venezuela, and especially in state enterprises,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

again, reactivating our participatory and protagonistic democracy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jonah Raskin

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

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

American economy.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Press Release

Stop The Criminalisation of Triple Talaq

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

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

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

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

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

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

Below are our points of objection to the Bill:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ajai Sreevatsan

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

possible otherwise.

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

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