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Editor : G. G. Parikh

Associate Editor : Neeraj Jain

Managing Editor : Guddi

Editorial Board :

B. Vivekanandan, Qurban Ali

Anil Nauriya, Sonal Shah

Amarendra Dhaneshwar,

Sandeep Pandey

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

Email : janataweekly@gmail.com

Website:www.janataweekly.org

From the Editor's Desk . . .

Dear friends,

Dr G.G. Parekh and myself take this opportunity to wish you a very healthy and active and happy new year, full of new initiatives in our efforts to change our country for the better.

It goes without saying that 2019 will be a pivotal and momentous time for our country and the entire planet. As you know, there is a monumental clash now taking place between two very different political visions. Not to get you too nervous, but the future of our country and the world is dependent upon which side wins that struggle.

The bad news is that in India and other parts of the world, the foundations of democracy are under severe attack as demagogues, supported by billionaire oligarchs, work to establish authoritarian type regimes. That is true in Russia. That is true in Brazil. That is true in the United States. While the very rich get much richer these demagogues seek to move us toward tribalism and set one group against another, deflecting attention from the real crises we face.

The good news is that, all across our country, people are getting politically involved and are fighting back. They are standing up for economic, political, social and racial justice.

In the last year we saw several lakh farmers participate in the Kisan Mukti March to Delhi to highlight the worsening agrarian scenario and the continued neglect of the agricultural sector by the government.

We saw around 5 million women forming a 620-km long Human Chain in Kerala for gender equality and justice.

We saw incredibly courageous young people fighting right wing attacks on them in universities all across the country.

We saw lakhs of workers come out on the streets to protest privatisation, increasing use of contract labour, and the anti-labour amendment to labour laws.

We saw history being created, if not corrected, when the Constitution bench of the Supreme Court decriminalised the archaic section 377 of the Indian Penal Code.

After four and a half years, we also saw the people finally seeing through the lies of the Modi Government and voting it out of power in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh.

As we enter 2019, it seems to us that we must mount a two-pronged offensive. First, we must vigorously stand up to the assault on our Constitutional values of secularism, democracy and fraternity

of the Modi Government, and ensure its defeat in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

But that is not going to be enough. The ordinary people are in deep crisis – more than 3.5 lakh farmers have committed suicide over the past two decades due to the neoliberal policies being implemented in the country, the youth are facing a terrible unemployment crisis, more than 50% of our children are functionally illiterate, our country has become the disease capital of the world, violence on women has reached such high levels that India is probably the worst place in the world to be born a woman, atrocities on Dalits continue unabated, there is no social security for the seniors. We need to push the opposition towards a progressive and popular agenda that speaks to the real needs of the people. We must tell Dalal Street, the Ambanis and Adanis and Tatas, and the American and European multinational corporations setting up shop in India, that we will not allow their greed to destroy this country and our planet.

In the New Year, let us resolve to fight like we have never fought before for a government, a society and an economy that works for all of us, not just those on top.

Wishing you a wonderful new year,

Neeraj Jain

Neo-Liberalism and the Diffusion of Development

Prabhat Patnaik

The level of economic activity under capitalism is subject to prolonged ebbs and flows. When the economy is on an upswing, this very fact acts as an elixir that emboldens capitalists, who begin to expect that the “good times” are going to continue; this makes them less worried about taking risks, more “adventurous”, and hence more prone to taking “bolder” decisions in their asset preference. And because of this they also undertake investment in physical assets like construction, equipment and machinery which makes the boom continue, and thereby justifies their euphoria.

The opposite happens when there is a downturn. It introduces a gloomy outlook among the capitalists; they become more acutely conscious of risks, become scared in their asset preference, and curtail their investment, preferring to hold money instead which is a riskless asset (though it earns nothing). This very fact in turn makes the slump prolonged, and thereby justifies their fear of taking risks.

This very obvious feature of capitalism, namely the self-sustaining euphoria associated with a boom and the self-sustaining gloom associated with a slump, has a bearing on the issue of diffusion of development to the Third World. We are talking here of diffusion that spontaneously occurs through the working of unfettered capitalism of the sort that neoliberalism typifies, not diffusion brought about through deliberate Third World State action

involving protectionism and such like.

For capital, whether of the metropolis or of the Third World, the latter constitutes a site of greater risk. The metropolis is the home base of capitalism and capitalists of all description, whatever the colour of their skin, feel safer there than even in their own countries (which is why there is so much of siphoning of funds from the Third World by its own capitalists). In a boom however, which is a period of euphoria, the risk of holding Third World assets gets underestimated. The euphoria of a boom extends to the realm of asset preference where not only is greater investment in general undertaken by capital (rather than its holding on to the barren but riskless asset, money), but even Third World assets are demanded to a greater extent. The differential preference for metropolitan compared to Third World assets gets reduced, which, apart from bringing greater direct investment to the Third World, also brings greater finance for buying up Third World assets. The relative price of Third World assets compared to metropolitan assets increases; or, put differently, for any given price of metropolitan assets, the price of Third World assets rises, which increases the production of such assets (i.e., increases investment) and hence raises the growth rate in the Third World.

Exactly the opposite happens in a world economic recession. As capitalists become more risk-averse, not only do direct investment

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flows to the Third World dry up (which may be further aggravated by protectionism in the metropolis of the sort that Trump is introducing), but finance capital too stops coming to the Third World; indeed there develops a tendency for finance, whether originating in the metropolis or even within the Third World, to move towards the metropolis. The relative price of Third World assets compared to those from the metropolis drops which further chokes off local investment, causing a fall in the Third World growth rate.

The foregoing has two implications. The first, which is fairly indubitable is that booms in world capitalism in conditions of neoliberalism are associated with higher growth rates in the Third World, while slumps in world capitalism have the opposite effect. The second implication which is stronger is that the fluctuations in growth rates in the Third World are greater than the fluctuations in the growth rates in the metropolis, since the impact of risk-aversion on investment falls even more heavily on the Third World than on the metropolis, with Third World asset prices relative to metropolitan asset prices also fluctuating. In short, euphoria or gloom in world capitalism has an even greater impact on the Third World than on the metropolis in conditions of neoliberalism.

What this means is that the very “pundits” who were lauding the higher growth in the Third World compared to its own past during the boom years of neoliberalism, and employing such growth as evidence of the beneficial effects of neoliberalism (conveniently forgetting even at that time that a process of primitive accumulation

of capital was being unleashed against peasants and petty producers, which swelled the labour reserves to the detriment of all working people including even the unionised workers of the organised sector), will now have to eat their words. As the world capitalist recession continues and even gets accentuated, as finance begins to flow back increasingly to the metropolis as is already happening (resulting in a depreciation of several Third World currencies, including above all the rupee, vis-à-vis the US dollar), investment and growth rate in the Third World will dry up to an even greater extent than in the metropolis.

Since there is no end to the capitalist recession in sight, and since protectionism as is being practiced by Trump will only worsen the world crisis by intensifying the gloom about the future (even though the US may temporarily gain from this “beggar-my-neighbour” policy, only until others retaliate), the particularly acute distress of the Third World that this recession brings with it, will also be a prolonged phenomenon. The Third World in short is sinking into a prolonged period of stagnation. This will bring acute distress to the working people, since the primitive accumulation of capital at the expense of the peasants and petty producers that had accompanied the capitalist boom, will continue unabated, while stagnation will only further reduce employment generation within the capitalist sector.

The hype about the diffusion of development to the Third World in short will soon disappear. This is not the first time that such a reversal is happening. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, during the late Victorian and Edwardian booms,

there was also a hype about the diffusion of development to the Third World. But many of the Third World countries which were among the fastest growers of that time are today being counted as the world’s “least developed” countries, Myanmar being a classic example. To be sure, the diffusion of development to the Third World during the capitalist boom of the recent neoliberal period has been more pronounced than earlier; and Myanmar’s fortune was tied to its oil resources whose exhaustion spelled its doom. But the point is that the phenomenon of yesterday’s champions being tomorrow’s laggards is by no means uncommon.

The Great Depression of the 1930s had followed the collapse of the long Victorian and Edwardian boom, and during the Depression only those Third World countries had flourished which had managed to delink themselves from the web of unfettered world capitalism by imposing controls over trade and capital flows. Notable among these were the Latin American countries that had embarked on a “nationalist strategy” of import-substituting industrialisation after overthrowing the local oligarchies that had been in cahoots with imperialism. Colonised economies like India, by contrast, though they did see some industrialisation since even the colonial regime had to introduce a meagre amount of what was called “discriminating protection” to appease the local bourgeoisie, did not see enough of it.

We are once more entering a period of significant political upheavals and economic changes within the world capitalist system, as a consequence of the crisis whose impact on the Third World, as

suggested above, will be particularly acute.

One thing however is indubitable. An impression had been created of late that the Third World can overcome its economic misery even while remaining within the orbit of world capitalism, that neoliberalism was giving rise to a diffusion of development to the Third World

from the metropolis which was so pronounced that the earlier argument about socialism alone creating conditions for overcoming the Third World's economic travails, had become passé; and even if some residual poverty remained within the Third World despite rapid growth, it was only a matter of time before

that too would disappear through a "trickle down" of growth. Capitalism in short was the panacea for mass poverty in the Third World and not its progenitor as the Socialists had been arguing. The crisis that is enveloping the Third World economies at present, is putting an end to that claim.

Democracy: The Instrument Of Humanity

T.M. Krishna

Full text of Carnatic vocalist T.M. Krishna's speech when he accepted the Indira Gandhi Award for National Integration for 2015–16. We are reproducing it because it has become even more relevant today than two years ago when he delivered it.

I stand before you to accept an award for having contributed to national integration. But before I bask in its glory I need to place on record the unevenness or shall I say the un-integratedness of my own citizenship. I would like to believe that I am just another ordinary Indian. But I am not, certainly not. I am born into a privileged caste and class. I am English speaking and a culturally empowered citizen of this country. Whether I realise it or not and even if I am unable to accept its realness, this is a fact. And being a singer, in a tradition that is steeped in all these qualifications I become an emblem of what is being touted today as 'Indian Culture'. I am a preferred-citizen. I may try to understand but will never, in my within, experience what it means to be a Dalit, Muslim or a tribal and will never be just another person on the street.

But my art, Karnatik music, has

given me a gift. A gift of experience, a gift of empathy, a gift to sense life beyond my limitations. This experience made me realise that my art, my way of life, my beliefs, religion, practices, rituals and everything else that makes me who I am is just one dot in the grand universe of India.

It is art's generosity that brings me here today.

The human being is a complex creature, one part of which is designed to own, control, subjugate, discipline and dictate. But there is another beautiful side to us, the sensitive, empathetic and compassionate one. Right through our lives we vacillate between the two with each side winning a few bouts. But at a much deeper level, the environment we have created for ourselves moulds our intrinsic humanness. And it is in this context that democracy becomes a vital, non-negotiable instrument—the instrument of humanity.

Democracy lives in its spirit of intention—which is to make us all better human beings. It demands humanity from every citizen, community and government, and hence has not been and will never be easy. We have gone through times when we placed democracy under

siege. Born in January 1976, I am a child of one of those difficult times.

But we did move ahead and beyond.

As I grew up in the 1980s and early 90s, national integration was a significant part of my vocabulary. Leaders from across the political spectrum spoke about this with great vigour re-enforcing its centrality to India. In spite of the terrible violence that erupted at various times in different parts of the country, we seemed to recover and an inner consciousness in our civil society kept reiterating our togetherness. And in this context I must mention Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's apology for the 1984 riots. This was a reflective and essential statement. Some detractors may say "it does not change anything". It cannot change the past but definitely changes the future.

A leader who does not have the humility to apologise for genocide under his watch does not integrate.

But I say with regret that as we entered a new millennium this idea of national integration lost its sheen, it did not attract anyone's attention, it did not matter anymore. It is also possible that we became over-confident, arrogant about the

un-penetrability of our syncretic culture. We spoke much about development and soon national integration became passé.

In spite of socially equalising legislations such as the Right for Information Act of 2005 and NREGA, we somehow forgot that if we do not remain caring of our people and vigilant of the dangers that lurked behind the scenes, we will enter times when who we are as a nation will be under serious threat.

And here we are today.

We live in times when national integration has been replaced by an ugly form of nationalism—jingoism. We are being told what to eat, wear, say, think and be. One monolithic order is being forced on us as Indian culture.

As a person of and in culture let me say this unequivocally, there is no one Indian culture—there are Indian cultures—the plurality is the signifier of integration. Uniformity breeds homogeneity, unity through national integration cradles respect.

We are facing one of the greatest challenges posed to our democracy, constitution, plurality, citizenship and socialism. These cornerstones of India are being subverted, dismantled, maligned and morphed right before our eyes. The methods being used are not secretive anymore, dissenters have been killed and all of us who resist are being warned of what is coming.

If there is anytime that national integration needs to be brought back into public thought, it is today and there is no time to waste. And this integration is not just about religious minorities; it is as much about Dalits, Tribals, ethnic and linguistic minorities.

The basic fabric of India is its cultures and if we allow that to be

poisoned, we would have placed on the sacrificial altar our entire civilisational consciousness. The battle will be lost and we just cannot let that happen.

I will continue this journey of questioning, resisting, learning and discovering. And in accepting this award, I am just a conduit to creating more discourses on who we are as a country and where we want to be. I thank all those who have travelled this path and continue to inspire and mentor me in my seeking. In essence I am merely continuing in the tradition of India's democratic thinkers, who believed in our goodness.

Before I end I would like to render a few verses from a hymn that is part of Gandhi-ji's Ashram songs. I hope we can keep these words in our hearts and expand its horizons.

Om tat sat

Shri Narayana tu

siddhabuddhitu

skandavinayakasavitapavakatu

brahmamazdatu

yahvashaktitu

Ishu pita prabhutu

Rudravishnutu

ramakrishnatu

raheem ta O tu

Vishvarupatu

advitiyatu

akalanirbhayaatmalingatu

Om tat sat

Cracking the Glass Ceiling With the Wall

Sagari Chhabra

A 620-kilometre-long wall of almost five million women was created in Kerala, striking down the brahmanical, right-wing forces of patriarchy, reasserting the progressive values of the people of India, and is all set to enter the Guinness Book of World Records. The women in Kerala led by Brinda Karat (CPIM) and Annie Raja and numerous other groups including progressive Hindu organisations—with the support of Pinarayi Vijayan, the chief minister of Kerala—have asserted that the right wing forces cannot keep women in the confines of four walls. The wall is an assertion that women's place is wherever she wishes it to be—in the boardroom, at the desk, behind a computer or in the fields. She may pray if she wishes to, and no one can deny her entry anywhere.

The two women, Bindu and

Kanaka Durga, who managed to enter the temple through the Pamba base camp, avoiding the heavily guarded 188 steps, have also created history and her-story. Feminist wits will always bring down the wall of patriarchy. Only the temple being closed down for purification and cleansing, even if for an hour, is a sad commentary on how the brahmin males in power, backed by the right wing forces including complicit women, are using the old bag of rituals and tricks to refuse to move forward. May God Ayappa grant them salvation for they know not what they do—they are crucifying humanity at the altar of greed and power as the Sabarimala temple receives a large amount of alms from its devotees who do an arduous trek, barefoot to reach the deity.

The Supreme Court gave a majority judgement—with a

surprising dissent from its only woman judge—stating that denying women the right to enter was denying them the right to equality. However, this order was trampled over by the right wing forces that bullied and indeed terrorised women, who tried to visit the temple. Several were hit, many had to head back.

The battle had reached its crescendo. If constitutional rights backed by the Supreme Court order and the government in the state of Kerala are threatened, then therein lies a sorry tale of the spirit of democracy in India.

However, the central government still lives in denial as if women do not work, and if they work, they do not have children. This schizophrenic conduct of the people in power who believe that raising the highest statue in the world is a phallic assertion, while women are denied the most basic things: food, safety, right to work—as the burden of childcare, housework and caring of the old is dumped on them—is manifest everywhere in India.

While high-rise buildings are being built and bullet trains bought, we do not mandate a children's room in every building when land is transferred in the name of the people. A small room where a mother—and why not a father—can leave a child safely as they proceed to do their daily work, would bring down child rape. Let us have a humane society, and affirm that keeping children safe is a collective responsibility that the state should not abdicate and dump onto women's shoulders. Free women wish to live and work in freedom—and worship if they wish to—not as slaves.

Sadly, the opposition Congress has called the women's wall 'communal', as it is backed by

some Hindu groups but what could be more myopic? This year, may women emerge as a collective force and vote for those who stand for women's rights. Those who want to push women back into a dark era should stand by the sidelines, and learn the basics of democracy: humanity, equality and a progressive attitude. If you want our vote,

include us—women!

Three cheers for the women who led the wall, and broke another wall of patriarchy. To the women who stood as the wall, thank you for being the change we want to see, and for ushering the new year with a bang. The 2019 elections will hopefully bring in the change, as women vote for women's rights.

The Narendra Modi Interview That Should Have Been

Ajoy Ashirwad Mahaprashasta

Indian democracy has unique ways to yank larger-than-life political leaders to the ground.

Indira Gandhi was handed a comprehensive defeat after she unleashed the Emergency on the Indian public. Later, again, her son Rajiv—trapped in the Bofors scandal—brought the Congress tally to a mere 197 in 1989 after having won a whopping 414 seats out of 545 in the previous general election.

One of the most popular leaders of India, the Bharatiya Janata Party's Atal Bihari Vajpayee, mounted a never-seen-before "India Shining" campaign in 2004, only to come a cropper.

Cut to the present day, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi has promised a "New India". Until recently, Modi and the BJP had been riding a wave of multiple electoral victories till the loss of three of the most-crucial Hindi heartland states—Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. This came after it failed to form a government in Karnataka and had struggled to retain Modi's own home state, Gujarat.

On the first day of 2019, the prime minister, who has avoided open press conferences until now, chose to address the perception that he is on the back foot by giving an interview—a one-to-one interaction with ANI's editor Smita Prakash. In it, he sought to address the slew of criticisms that have been levelled against his government.

But much like all his previous interviews over the last four years, this too turned out to be bereft of any diligent and persistent cross-questioning.

The interview was yet another exercise when Modi was given a platform to attack the Congress, and lead the audience towards believing that the Indian political system is only a contest between him and the opposition—or more like a Modi versus Rahul Gandhi cricket match.

It also became a platform for Modi to give indirect and unclear replies to accusations against his government. In the process, the question and answer session appeared more like a part of the BJP's campaign strategy than an interview in which the country's

prime minister could be held accountable for his decisions.

Over the past few years, Modi has only given interviews to fawning media channels or those who have agreed to let their questions pass through the PMO's strict vetting process in advance. In multiple instances, it was alleged that the PMO either asked the media houses to completely remove some of their critical questions, or phrase them in a way to suit the prime minister's replies.

In other cases, when the prime minister did not have to face the camera, the PMO has insisted on an email interview. A case in point would be when the French newspaper Le Monde was offered an email interview with Modi in 2015, even though it did not eventually publish it.

ANI's interview comes at a juncture when the government is being attacked for its failure to contain rural distress and urban unemployment. Analysts say that the twin debacles of demonetisation and a flawed GST have impacted the Indian economy so disastrously that large parts of the country have failed to recover from it even after two years of their implementation.

On the social front, the number of mob lynchings of Muslims has increased, the press freedom index shows India going down multiple levels, and the impunity that Hindutva activists enjoy has increased to such an extent that they did not hesitate in killing a policeman too, as was seen in Bulandshahr recently.

The government is also caught in a tight corner with allegations of corruption coming to the fore. From charges over the controversial Rafale deal to the lack of proper action

against corporate loan defaulters, the opposition has fired one salvo after another.

While such issues are doing the rounds, the Modi government has also been blamed for compromising the autonomy of state institutions and pushing a majoritarian political agenda.

In this context, the prime minister's interview came out as a dampener: criticisms were posed but without any follow-ups, allowing the prime minister to turn every accusation into an opportunity to bash the opposition and project himself.

In a different world, where the media takes the role of being a watchdog more seriously, this interview could have been different.

Demonetisation

To a question on the negative impact of demonetisation, the prime minister said that "*ab safaai ho gayi hai* (now cleaning has been done)" and the economy will revive. He also said that there is less cash in the system, tax net has expanded, and that the black money has now been incorporated into formal banking system.

Any journalist who would have done her homework would have naturally asked these four straight questions.

- 1) An estimated four lakh small and medium enterprises had to shut shop because of demonetisation. This means around two crore people lost their jobs, even if we assume not more than 50 workers were employed in these units.
- 2) The latest RBI data shows that currency in circulation is growing by 22.7% every year. When demonetisation

was implemented, there was 17.01 lakh crore in circulation. However, in November, 2018, it was estimated to be around 18.76 lakh crore.

- 3) 99.3% of demonetised currency came back into the banking system, according to the RBI data. Does it not mean that the drastic step only formalised the so-called black money?
- 4) The unorganised sector and the agrarian sector have still not revived after two years since demonetisation.

Hate crimes

On this issue, the prime minister condemned elements that are polarising the society on issues like cow protection. However, yet again, he was given a free-hand when he effectively blamed those who were murdered by the mob by saying that people should respect each other's sentiments. "If you honour those sentiments, your sentiments are also respected," he said.

Instead, he could have been asked the following:

1) What action has the Centre initiated against BJP leaders who have openly supported alleged lynchings. For instance, Modi's former colleague in the cabinet Jayant Sinha garlanded convicted *gau rakshaks* in July 2018. Or, what does he have to say on Uttar Pradesh chief minister Adityanath's entirely sidelining a policeman's murder at the hands of Hindutva activists in Bulandshahr recently but pledging to bring alleged cow killers to book?

2) In most of these cases, the mob has acted against suspected cow slaughterers before the police could. Many of those murdered, it is proven now, were only transporting cattle for trade. Does he not see this as a

collapse of law and order?

3) You said that some people rake up these issues only before the elections. When lakhs of Muslims are living under constant fear and are also articulating it, is it not your responsibility to address that sense of insecurity instead of brushing it aside as a political conspiracy. After all, many BJP leaders have come on record to say that those who feel unsafe in India should go to Pakistan.

Gender equality

The prime minister said that while triple talaq was a matter of women's rights, the BJP campaign against the entry of women in Sabarimala shrine in Kerala was a matter of faith. Though his logic was questionable, no effort was made to draw him out on its obvious contradictions. Obvious follow-ups like the following were never asked:

- 1) You have played up the issue of minority appeasement in your campaigns. Now you have moved to criminalise Muslim men for Triple Talaq while remaining conspicuously silent about Hindus who abandon their wives with impunity (around 1.9 million Hindu women claimed themselves as separated as against 0.28 million Muslim women). What actions does he plan to bring such ensure Hindu women are not abandoned?
- 2) Despite having supported the women's reservation bill in the parliament in 2013, why has the Centre not introduced the same over the last four years? India is placed at 147 out of 188 countries as far as the number of women in parliament is concerned, according to data from inter-parliamentary union.

- 3) Crimes against women have shot up by 82% in your tenure. At 18.9%, the conviction rate in such cases is the lowest in the last decade. What measures have you taken to improve these figures, which have come from the government's own National Crime Records Bureau.

Agrarian crisis

Modi claimed that it was because of his efforts that India had a bumper harvest this year. He said that his government has taken steps to facilitate a better business climate for farmers, including marking a minimum support price for at least 22 crops.

He questioned the logic of loan waivers that the new Congress state government have made a big deal over and said that agriculture should be reformed in a structural way. Fair enough, but, again, many questions remain.

- 1) Why, despite promising in your manifesto, have you not implemented the M.S. Swaminathan committee report?
- 2) Your government has pledged to double the income of farmers. Agricultural experts have contested your claims. You also renamed the agriculture ministry to the agriculture and farmers' welfare ministry. Despite all your efforts, facing a twin crisis of rising input costs and poor markets, farmers have been protesting in the lakhs. But there has been no significant relief from the government's side.

Rafale aircraft deal

Again, the prime minister was not probed when he got out by merely invoking the Supreme Court's rejection of pleas seeking a

probe on the deal.

Here are a set of issues which the prime minister could have easily been asked to explain:

- 1) Why was the previous deal with Dassault Aviation scrapped to reduce the number of fighter jets to 36 from 126 which were to be purchased earlier?
- 2) Is the Congress's allegation that the jets were bought for more than Rs 1600 crore—three times more the price negotiated by the UPA government—correct?
- 3) How could he single handedly sign the deal with France without keeping his cabinet colleagues in the loop, including then defence minister Manohar Parrikar?
- 4) Was there a violation of the defence procedure code? Was the pre-approval clause by the cabinet committee on security bypassed in the process?
- 5) Why was Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL)—a public sector company which was supposed to manufacture 108 of the 126 aircraft in the previous agreement—not considered as an offset partner in the new inter-governmental deal?
- 6) Francois Hollande, the French president with whom you signed the deal, has said that the Indian government had instructed them to rope in Anil Ambani as an offset partner instead of HAL. Does such lobbying for a private company not amount to cronyism?

Political violence

The prime minister condemned the fact that BJP workers are getting beaten up by the opposition in states like Kerala, Assam, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal—which is a fair remark to make.

However, the audience would also have liked to know his views about the persistent accusations by the opposition of similar violent incidents against non-BJP activists in the BJP-ruled states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Tripura.

These are only a few instances where the prime minister could have been probed. But that did not happen as Modi went on to do what he does best—advertise his welfare schemes while avoiding concrete answers about current political debates.

The only concrete answer he gave was that his government would not pass an ordinance on the construction of the Ram Mandir until the apex court delivers its judgement.

In the one-and-a half hour interaction, the rest remained unasked. Most of his welfare schemes remain severely underfunded. The smart cities mission did not take off at all nor did his much-touted Skill India programme. The IT sector is in decline and start-ups are reeling under a poor investment climate.

What the impact of the much-publicised Mudra loans has been remains unknown except that it may add to the ever-expanding NPAs of the Indian banks.

While the government claims to have encouraged transparency in governance, it has also moved forward to dilute the RTI Act and failed to appoint a Lokpal—again an election promise.

Throughout the interview, the prime minister projected himself as if he was working without the assistance of his cabinet. This has been his style since 2014. The press hardly comes to know about what different ministries have done in the past four years.

Even in his comment on surgical strikes, he spoke about how he had been monitoring every moment when the operation was taking place. The army briefed the cabinet committee on security only after it was successful. What was the role of the defence minister here, we do not know.

Political observers have pointed out that there has been a deliberate subversion of parliamentary norms under Modi. While in the interview he spoke about the need to have in-depth discussions in parliament, he was not asked why his attendance there remains really poor. The number of parliamentary sittings has

only declined under Modi. With only 57 sittings, 2017 recorded one of the poorest figures.

More than anything, the interview appeared to be BJP's effort to reclaim the political narrative in its favour, nothing more—a ploy it has been using for years.

But a vital question remains unasked and, therefore, unanswered: There is a big gap between what Modi promised during his prime ministerial campaign and what got done in the last four years. Many think most of those promises were unrealistic.

But will Modi concur?

Can an Unequal Earth Beat Climate Change?

Sam Pizzigati

We either keep fossil fuels in the ground, or all of us are going to fry. So essentially posits still another new blockbuster study on climate change, this one just published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. Our fossil-fuel industrial economy, the study details, has made for the fastest climate changes our Earth has ever seen.

“If we think about the future in terms of the past, where we are going is uncharted territory for human society,” notes the study lead author Kevin Burke from the University of Wisconsin.

“In the roughly 20 to 25 years I have been working in the field,” adds another researcher on the effort, Wisconsin's John Williams, “we have gone from expecting climate change to happen, to detecting the effects, and now, we are seeing that it's causing harm,” as measured

in property damage and deaths, in intensified flooding and fires.

The last time climate on Earth saw nearly as drastic and rapid a climate shift, scientists relate in another new study published in the journal *Science*, came some 252 million years ago, and that shift unfolded over the span of a few thousand years. Those span of time saw the extinction of 96 percent of the Earth's ocean species and almost as devastating a loss to terrestrial creatures.

Other scientific studies over this past year—most notably an October report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that warned we have a dozen years to avert a climate catastrophe—have made similarly alarming observations and together provided an apt backdrop for this month's United Nations climate change talks in Poland.

Researchers had hoped these

talks would stiffen the global resolve to seriously address the climate change crisis. But several nations had other ideas. The United States, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait have all refused to officially “welcome” the findings of the blue-ribbon Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, essentially throwing a huge monkey-wrench into efforts to mobilise a fitting global response.

What unites these four recalcitrant nations? One key characteristic stands out: The United States, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait all just happen to rate among the world’s most unequal nations.

Just a coincidence? Absolutely not, suggests a new analysis from the Civil Society Equity Review coalition, a worldwide initiative that counts in its ranks the Climate Action Network International, 350.org, and scores of other global, regional, and national groups committed to averting a climatic cataclysm.

Limiting global warming to 1.5°C—the goal the global scientific community now sees as the absolute least we ought to be striving to achieve—will require, the Civil Society Equity Review analysis explains, “disruptive shifts” and heighten “anxieties about loss, displacement, and social insecurity.”

People will tolerate these disruptions, the analysis continues, but only if they believe that everyone is sharing in the sacrifice, the wealthy and powerful included.

Over recent years, environmental policy makers have essentially defined the wealthy at the level of the nation state. The focus has been on the relationships between wealthy nations and developing nations still struggling to amass wealth. Wealthier nations, the

climate change consensus has come to understand, have a responsibility to help poorer nations meet the environmental challenges ahead.

But the new Civil Society Equity Review report—*After Paris: Inequality, Fair Shares, and the Climate Emergency*—argues that we need to expand our focus from inequality between nations to inequality within nations as well.

“If we are to achieve the critical outcome of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C, the wealthy (individuals and companies) in all nations must take the greatest action to both reduce their own emissions and to support the global transition,” *After Paris* stresses. “The wealthy must not be able to hide from their responsibilities.”

The more unequal a wealthy society, the greater the power of the rich—and the corporations they run—to do that hiding. And the inequality their wealth engenders, *After Paris* adds, also has “much to do with the dark character of the current political moment,” the growing levels of xenophobia and racism that make serious environmental aid from developed to developing nations ever less likely.

“The greatest effort of the climate transition must ultimately be borne by the people who have the wealth,” the new Civil Society Equity Review analysis concludes, “and this has to be true both within countries and between them.”

The wealthy and their corporations, left to their own devices, would for the most part rather not bear any sort of significant transitional sacrifice. How best to get them to meet their responsibilities—and help lighten the “dark character of the current political moment”? One stab at that necessary political

project has just come from Thomas Piketty, the world’s most famous inequality analyst, and over 50 other economists, historians, and former elected leaders from throughout Europe.

These thought-leaders have issued a “manifesto for the democratisation of Europe” that sees the current institutions of the European Union stuck in “a technocratic impasse” that benefits only the rich. The manifesto—published last month (December 2018) in seven major European media outlets—calls for a new European Assembly with an \$800-billion annual budget financed via increased taxes on corporate profits and the income and wealth of the EU’s most affluent, plus a new tax on carbon emissions.

Steps like these could help ease the way for a serious offensive against the ravages of climate change. But many more such steps will be necessary, as Basav Sen, the climate justice director at the Institute for Policy Studies, reminds us.

“Addressing climate change effectively and justly,” sums up Sen, “requires us to transform the unjust social and economic systems that gave us climate change in the first place.”

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BEST's Contracting-Out of Bus Services: A Case Study in Privatisation

According to the currently dominant ideology, privatisation is identified with greater 'efficiency' (the meaning of which is kept vague). Privatisation may take different forms: the handing over of existing public sector assets to private investors; permitting private investors to enter sectors hitherto reserved for the public sector; opening up exploration and mining of mineral wealth to private investors; promoting insurance schemes in place of universal provision of basic services; contracting out to private firms jobs hitherto done by the public sector; and so on.

But whatever the form, the dominant ideology claims that privatisation delivers the goods more effectively, and more cheaply. Private firms are said to be driven by profit motive to lower costs and compete with other firms. Even if the activity to be privatised is a monopoly, it can be awarded to a private firm through competitive bidding, in which the State can specify the fulfilment of various criteria / targets as part of the contract. A firm which does not fulfil its contract can be penalised or replaced with another firm. In this way, we are told, the building of a public sector institution, with an experienced workforce developed over years of stable employment, is no longer necessary. The magic of the 'market' will do the job.

The actual provision of services by private parties has to be assessed over a longer period, during which some sections of people may gain and others may lose, some aspects of those services may flourish and

others disappear. These changes have far-reaching consequences, and require careful study. Nevertheless, one prominent claim of the pro-privatisation lobby should not go unchallenged in the process: that privatisation saves public funds.

Here, we look at the decision of Mumbai's public bus service, the Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST), to contract out bus services to private firms. The Municipal Commissioner and the management of BEST claim that this policy will yield large savings and reduce BEST's financial deficit. We look more closely at this claim.

(i) On the face of it, it appears that by contracting out ('wet-leasing'), BEST's total expenditure per midi-bus would fall by 26 per cent. This appears to be a big saving.

(ii) Where are the 'savings' coming from? Are they coming from greater efficiency and more attention to costs? Unfortunately, there are no data regarding the break-up of contractor costs. So we try to find out where these savings could be made. Let us assume that fuel efficiency rises to the best levels of metropolitan bus services in India. Let us eliminate some overhead costs completely, and keep others to a minimum. Even after this, these heads can account for only a small part of the claimed savings.

The simple fact is that contractors will make the overwhelming bulk of the cost reductions by cutting wage costs, whatever be the impact on the employees and the general public. That is what goes under the name of 'greater efficiency'.

(iii) In recent times, in many 'public-private partnership' ventures in infrastructure, the private partner wins the contract by deliberately putting in unrealistically low bids. Once having captured the deal, they start lobbying for a change in the terms of the contract. Since it is now more expensive and time-consuming to replace them, the authorities are under pressure to make concessions. This of course makes nonsense of the entire elaborate process by which the private firms were selected.

So it is important to examine in advance whether the winning bid is really sustainable. In the case of the winning bids by BEST contractors, they do not appear to be sustainable. Despite assuming such drastic cost reductions, the rates of the winning bids leave very little room for profit. Given the low rates of the winning bids, contractors may in future lobby for a revision in rates; or they may cut expenditures on wages or on maintenance even further, at the cost of the safety, reliability and quality of services.

(iv) Moreover, the claim of large savings in expenditures turns out to be based on a wrong comparison. Contract buses are to run 160 km/day. If we look at the costs of existing BEST buses running 160 km or more a day, it emerges that the cost of contracting out would be only 5-6 per cent lower than the cost of the comparable BEST buses. This is a trivial saving for which to destroy a long-established public transport institution with an experienced employee base. These data merely underline the need for the BMC and

BEST to ensure that each bus is able to complete a longer distance every day, by reducing traffic congestion and providing BEST right of way / access. If that is done, the cost per km will automatically fall.

(v) Further, if the purpose of ‘wet-leasing’ is to reduce BEST’s financial deficit, we must take into account not only expenditures, but earnings as well. In this particular case, the wet-leased buses are smaller, and hence their earnings will be lower. The gap between earnings and expenditures would in fact expand. It is quite possible, then, that the deficit will actually rise with the wet-leasing of midi and mini buses in place of the existing standard buses.

(vi) Finally, we look at some other Indian cities which have already contracted out some part of their bus services. Contracting does not appear to prevent falling ridership or rising losses. Bangalore’s performance alone was better till 2014–15, but has since sharply deteriorated. Pune shows that multiple problems can arise with contracting out—poor services, frequent breakdowns and fires, disputes with contractors, even as subsidies rise and ridership falls. The subsidies to Delhi’s private buses in the cluster system amount to Rs 10 per passenger; indeed, a similar subsidy to BEST would eliminate its present annual deficit!

In sum, then, BEST’s decision to engage private contractors to provide bus services, in place of its own services, cannot be justified even in narrow financial terms. This is apart from the permanent damage that would be done by dismantling an important institution which has provided Mumbai a critical public service for decades.

RUPE, Mumbai

Love-Letters Like No Other

On January 3, 1831, 176 years ago Savitribai Phule, arguably India’s first woman teacher and forgotten liberator was born. With the first school for girls from different castes that she set up in Bhidewada (Pune), Krantijyoti Savitribai as she is reverentially known by the Indian Bahujan movement, blazed a revolutionary trail.

To mark the memory of this remarkable woman we bring to you her letters to life partner Jyotiba, written over a span of 20 years (translated from Marathi). Jyotiba and Savitribai were Comrades in Arms in their struggle against the emancipation of India’s disenfranchised people.

The letters are significant as they write of the wider concerns that drove this couple, the emancipation of the most deprived segments of society and the struggle to attain for them, full human dignity and freedom.

This vision for a new and liberated society—free from ignorance, bigotry, deprivation, and hunger—was the thread that bonded the couple, arching from the private to the personal. Theirs was a relationship of deep and shared concerns, each providing strength to the other, at a time when large sections of 19th century Maharashtrian society was ranged against Phule’s reconstructive radicalism.

Letter 1: Written from her parental home where she was recuperating from an illness.

October 1856

The Embodiment of Truth, My Lord Jyotiba,

Savitri salutes you!

After so many vicissitudes, now it seems my health has been fully restored. My brother worked so hard and nursed me so well through my sickness. His service and devotion shows how loving he really is! I will come to Pune as soon as I get perfectly well. Please do not worry about me. I know my absence causes Fatima so much trouble but I am sure she will understand and won’t grumble.

As we were talking one day, my brother said, “You and your husband have rightly been excommunicated because both of you serve the untouchables (Mahars and Mangs). The untouchables are fallen people and by helping them you are bringing a bad name to our family. That is why, I tell you to behave according to the customs of our caste and obey the dictates of the Brahmans.” Mother was so disturbed by this brash talk of my brother.

Though my brother is a good soul he is extremely narrow-minded and so he did not hesitate to bitterly criticize and reproach us. My mother did not reprimand him but tried instead to bring him to his senses, “God has given you a beautiful tongue but it is no good to misuse it so!” I defended our social work and tried to dispel his misgivings. I told him, “Brother, your mind is narrow, and the Brahmans’ teaching has made it worse. Animals like goats and cows are not untouchable for you, you lovingly touch them. You catch poisonous snakes on the day of the snake-festival and feed them milk. But you consider Mahars and Mangs, who are as human as you and I, untouchables.

Can you give me any reason for this? When the Brahmans perform their religious duties in their holy clothes, they consider you also impure and untouchable, they are afraid that your touch will pollute them. They don't treat you differently than the Mahars." When my brother heard this, he turned red in the face, but then he asked me, "Why do you teach those Mahars and Mangs? People abuse you because you teach the untouchables. I cannot bear it when people abuse and create trouble for you for doing that. I cannot tolerate such insults." I told him what the (teaching of) English had been doing for the people. I said, "The lack of learning is nothing but gross bestiality. It is through the acquisition of knowledge that (he) loses his lower status and achieves the higher one. My husband is a god-like man. He is beyond comparison in this world, nobody can equal him. He thinks the Untouchables must learn and attain freedom. He confronts the Brahmans and fights with them to ensure Teaching and Learning for the Untouchables because he believes that they are human beings like other and they should live as dignified humans. For this they must be educated. I also teach them for the same reason. What is wrong with that? Yes, we both teach girls, women, Mangs and Mahars. The Brahmans are upset because they believe this will create problems for them. That is why they oppose us and chant the mantra that it is against our religion. They revile and castigate us and poison the minds of even good people like you.

"You surely remember that the British Government had organised a function to honour my husband for his great work. His felicitation caused these vile people much

heartburn. Let me tell you that my husband does not merely invoke God's name and participate in pilgrimages like you. He is actually doing God's own work. And I assist him in that. I enjoy doing this work. I get immeasurable joy by doing such service. Moreover, it also shows the heights and horizons to which a human being can reach out."

Mother and brother were listening to me intently. My brother finally came around, repented for what he had said and asked for forgiveness. Mother said, "Savitri, your tongue must be speaking God's own words. We are blessed by your words of wisdom." Such appreciation from my mother and brother gladdened my heart. From this you can imagine that there are many idiots here, as in Pune, who poison people's minds and spread canards against us. But why should we fear them and leave this noble cause that we have undertaken? It would be better to engage with the work instead. We shall overcome and success will be ours in the future. The future belongs to us.

What more could I write?

With humble regards,

Yours,
Savitri

Letter 2:

29 August 1868

*Naigaon, Peta Khandala
Satara*

*.The Embodiment of Truth, My
Lord Jotiba,
Savitri salutes you!*

I received your letter. We are fine here. I will come by the fifth of next month. Do not worry on this count. Meanwhile, a strange thing happened here. The story goes like this. One Ganesh, a Brahman, would go around villages, performing

religious rites and telling people their fortunes. This was his bread and butter. Ganesh and a teenage girl named Sharja who is from the Mahar (untouchable) community fell in love. She was six months pregnant when people came to know about this affair. The enraged people caught them, and paraded them through the village, threatening to bump them off.

I came to know about their murderous plan. I rushed to the spot and scared them away, pointing out the grave consequences of killing the lovers under the British law. They changed their mind after listening to me.

Sadubhau angrily said that the wily Brahman boy and the untouchable girl should leave the village. Both the victims agreed to this. My intervention saved the couple who gratefully fell at my feet and started crying. Somehow I consoled and pacified them. Now I am sending both of them to you. What else to write?

Yours

Savitri

Letter 3:

20 April, 1877

Otur, Junner

*The Embodiment of Truth, My
Lord Jyotiba,
Savitri salutes you!*

The year 1876 has gone, but the famine has not—it stays in most horrendous forms here. The people are dying. The animals are dying, falling on the ground. There is severe scarcity of food. No fodder for animals. The people are forced to leave their villages. Some are selling their children, their young girls, and leaving the villages. Rivers, brooks and tanks have completely dried up—no water to drink. Trees are

dying—no leaves on trees. Barren land is cracked everywhere. The sun is scorching—blistering. The people crying for food and water are falling on the ground to die. Some are eating poisonous fruits, and drinking their own urine to quench their thirst. They cry for food and drink, and then they die.

Our Satyashodhak volunteers have formed committees to provide food and other life-saving material to the people in need. They have formed relief squads.

Brother Kondaj and his wife Umabai are taking good care of me. Otur's Shastri, Ganapati Sakharan, Dumbare Patil, and others are planning to visit you. It would be better if you come from Satara to Otur and then go to Ahmednagar.

You may remember R.B. Krishnaji Pant and Laxman Shastri. They travelled with me to the affected area and gave some monetary help to the victims.

The moneylenders are viciously exploiting the situation. Bad things are taking place as a result of this famine. Riots are breaking out. The Collector heard of this and came to ease the situation. He deployed the white police officers, and tried to bring the situation under control. Fifty Satyashodhaks were rounded up. The Collector invited me for a talk. I asked the Collector why the good volunteers had been framed with false charges and arrested without any rhyme or reason. I asked him to release them immediately. The Collector was quite decent and unbiased. He shouted at the white soldiers, "Do the Patil farmers rob? Set them free." The Collector was moved by the people's plights. He immediately sent four bullock cartloads of (jowar) food.

You have started the benevolent

and welfare work for the poor and the needy. I also want to carry my share of the responsibility. I assure you I will always help you. I wish the godly work will be helped by

more people.

I do not want to write more.

Yours,
Savitri

Courtesy: Sabrangindia Staff

Posture Maketh the Man

Stephen Jay Gould

No event did more to establish the fame and prestige of the Museum of Natural History than the Gobi Desert expeditions of the 1920s. The discoveries, including the first dinosaur egg, were exciting and abundant, and fit the sheer romance of Hollywood's most heroic mold. It is still hard to find a better adventure story than Roy Chapman Andrews's book (with its chauvinistic title:) *The New Conquest of Central Asia*. Nonetheless, the expeditions utterly failed to achieve their stated purpose: to find in Central Asia the ancestors of man. And they failed for the most elementary of reasons—we evolved in Africa, as Charles Darwin surmised fifty years earlier.

Our African ancestors (or at least our nearest cousins) were discovered in cave deposits during the 1920s. But these australopithecines failed to fit preconceived notions of what a "missing link" should look like, and many scientists refused to accept them as bonafide members of our lineage. Most anthropologists had imagined a fairly harmonious transformation from ape to human, propelled by increasing intelligence. A missing link should be intermediate in both body and brain—Alley Oop or the old (and false) representations of stoop-shouldered Neanderthals. But the australopithecines refused to conform. To be sure, their brains were bigger than those of any ape with

comparable body size, but not much bigger. Most of our evolutionary increase in brain size occurred after we reached the australopithecine level. Yet these small-brained australopithecines walked as erect as you or I. How could this be? If our evolution was propelled by an enlarging brain, how could upright posture—another "hallmark of hominization," not just an incidental feature—originate first? In a 1963 essay, George Gaylord Simpson used this dilemma to illustrate

"the sometimes spectacular failure to predict discoveries even when there is a sound basis for such prediction. An evolutionary example is the failure to predict discovery of a 'missing link', now known [*Australopithecus*], that was upright and tool-making but had the physiognomy and cranial capacity of an ape."

We must ascribe this "spectacular failure" primarily to a subtle prejudice that led to the following invalid extrapolation: We dominate other animals by brainpower (and little else); therefore, an increasing brain must have propelled our own evolution at all stages. The tradition for subordinating the upright posture to an enlarging brain can be traced throughout the history of anthropology. Karl Ernst von Baer, the greatest embryologist of the nineteenth century (and second

only to Darwin in my personal pantheon of scientific heroes) wrote in 1828: “Upright posture is only the consequence of the higher development of the brain . . . all differences between men and other animals depend upon construction of the brain.” One hundred years later, the English anthropologist G.E. Smith wrote: “It was not the adoption of the erect attitude or the invention of articulate language that made man from ape, but the gradual perfecting of the brain and the slow building of the mental structure, of which erectness of carriage and speech are some of the incidental manifestations.”

Against this chorus of emphasis on the brain, a very few scientists upheld the primacy of upright posture. Sigmund Freud based much of his highly idiosyncratic theory of the origin of civilisation upon it. Beginning in his letters to Wilhelm Fliess in the 1890s and culminating in his 1930 essay on *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud argued that our assumption of upright posture has reoriented our primary sensation from smell to vision. This devaluation of the olfaction shifted the object of sexual stimulation in males from the cyclic odors of estrus to the continual visibility of female genitalia. Continual desire in males leads to continual receptivity in females. Most mammals copulate only around periods of ovulation; humans are sexually active at all times (a favorite theme of writers on sexuality). Continual sexuality has centered the human family and made civilisation possible; animals with strongly cyclic copulation have no impetus for stable family structure. “The fateful process of civilisation,” Freud concludes, “would have set in with man’s adoption of an erect

posture.”

Although Freud’s ideas gained no following among anthropologists, another minor tradition did arise to stress the primacy of upright posture. (It is, by the way, the argument we tend to accept today in explaining the morphology of australopithecines and the path of human evolution.) The brain cannot begin to increase in a vacuum. A primary impetus must be provided by an altered mode of life that would place a strong, selective premium upon intelligence. Upright posture frees the hands from locomotion and for manipulation (literally, from manus = “hands”). For the first time, tools and weapons can be fashioned and used with ease. Increased intelligence is largely a response to the enormous potential in free hands for manufacture—again, literally. (Needless to say, no anthropologist has ever been so naive to argue that the brain and posture are completely independent in evolution, that one reached its full human status before the other began to change at all. We are dealing with interaction and mutual reinforcement. Nevertheless, our early evolution did involve a more rapid change in posture than in brain size; complete freeing of our hands for using tools preceded most of the evolutionary enlargement of our brain.)

In another proof that sobriety does not make right, von Baer’s mystical and oracular colleague Lorenz Oken hit upon the “correct” argument in 1809, while von Baer was led astray a few years later. “Man by the upright walk obtains his character,” writes Oken, “the hands become free and can achieve all other offices. . . . With the freedom of the body has been granted also the freedom of the mind.” But the

champion of the upright posture during the nineteenth century was Darwin’s German bulldog Ernst Haeckel. Without a scrap of direct evidence, Haeckel reconstructed our ancestor and even gave it a scientific name. (*Pithecanthropus*, by the way, is probably the only scientific name given to an animal before it was discovered. When Eugène Dubois discovered Java-man in the 1890s, he adopted Haeckel’s generic name but he gave it the new specific designation *Pithecanthropus erectus*. We now usually include this creature in our own genus as *Homo erectus*.)

But why, despite Haeckel’s demurrals, did the idea of cerebral primacy become so strongly entrenched? One thing is sure; it had nothing to do with direct evidence—for there was none for any position. With the exception of Neanderthal (a geographic variant of our own species, according to most anthropologists), no human fossils were discovered until the closing years of the nineteenth century, long after the dogma of cerebral primacy was established. But the debates based on no evidence are among the most revealing in the history of science, for in the absence of factual constraints, the cultural biases that affect all thought (and which scientists try so assiduously to deny) lie nakedly exposed.

Indeed, the nineteenth century produced a brilliant expose from a source that will no doubt surprise most readers—Frederick Engels. (A bit of reflection should diminish surprise. Engels had a keen interest in the natural sciences and sought to base his general philosophy of the dialectic of materialism upon a “positive” foundation. He did not live to complete his *Dialectic of Nature*, but he included long

commentaries on science in such treatises as the *Anti-Duhring*.) In 1876, Engels wrote an essay entitled, “The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man.” It was published posthumously in 1896 and, unfortunately, had no visible impact upon Western science.

Engels considers three essential features of human evolution: speech, a large brain, and upright posture. He argues that the first step must have been descent from the trees, with subsequent evolution to upright posture by our ground-dwelling ancestors. “These apes when moving on level ground began to drop the habit of using their hands and to adopt a more and more erect gait. This was a decisive step in the transition from ape to man.” Upright posture freed the hand for using tools (labor, in Engels’s terminology); increased intelligence and speech came later: “Thus the hand is not only the organ of labor, it is also the product of labor. Only by labor, by adaptation to ever new operations . . . by the ever-renewed employment of these inherited improvements in new, more and more complicated operations, has the human hand attained the high degree of perfection that has enabled it to conjure into being the pictures of Raphael, the statues of Thorwaldsen, the music of Paganini.”

Engels presents his conclusions as though they followed deductively from the premise of his materialist philosophy, but I am confident that he cribbed them from Haeckel. The two formulations are almost identical, and Engels cites the relevant pages of Haeckel’s work for other purposes in an earlier essay written in 1874. But no matter. The importance of Engels’s essay lies not in its substantive conclusions, but

in its trenchant political analysis of why Western science was so hung up on the a priori assertion of cerebral primacy.

As humans learned to master their material surroundings, Engels argues, other skills were added to primitive hunting—agriculture, spinning, pottery, navigation, arts and sciences, law and politics, and finally, “the fantastic reflection of human things in the human mind: religion.” As wealth accumulated, small groups of men seized power and forced others to work for them. Labor, the source of all wealth and the primary impetus for human evolution, assumed the same low status of those who labored for the rulers.* Since rulers governed by their will (that is, by feats of mind), actions of the brain appeared to have a motive power of their own. The profession of philosophy followed no unsullied ideal of truth. Philosophers relied on state religious patronage. Even if Plato did not consciously conspire to bolster the privileges of rulers with a supposed abstract philosophy, his own class encouraged an emphasis on thought as primary, dominating, and all together more important than the labor it supervised. This idealistic tradition dominated philosophy right down through Darwin’s day. Its influence was so subtle and pervasive that even scientific but apolitical materialists like Darwin fell under its sway. A bias must be recognised before it is challenged. Cerebral primacy seemed so obvious and natural that it was accepted as given, rather than recognised as a deep-seated social prejudice related to the class position of the professional thinkers and their patrons. Engels writes:

“All merit for the swift advance

of civilisation was ascribed to the mind, the development and activity of the brain. Men became accustomed to explain their actions from their thoughts, instead of from their need. . . . And so there arose in the course of time that idealistic outlook on the world which, especially since the downfall of the ancient world, has dominated men’s minds. It still rules them to such a degree that even the most materialistic natural scientists of the Darwinian school are still unable to form any clear idea of the origin of man, because under that ideological influence they do not recognise the part that is played therein by labor.”

The importance of Engels’s essay does not lie in the happy result that *Australopithecus* confirmed a specific theory posed by him—via Haeckel—but rather in his perceptive analysis of the political role of science and of the social biases that must affect all thought.

Indeed, Engels’s theme of separation of the head and hand has done much to set and limit the course of science throughout history. Academic science, in particular, has been constrained by an idea of “pure” research, which in former days barred a scientist from extensive experimentation and empirical testing. Ancient Greek science labored under the restriction that patrician thinkers could not perform the manual work of plebeian artists. Medieval barber-surgeons who had to deal with battlefield casualties did more to advance the practice of medicine than academic physicians who rarely examined patients and who based their treatment on a knowledge of Galen and other learned texts. Even today, “pure” researchers tend to disparage the practical, and terms such as “aggie

school” and “cow college” are heard with distressing frequency in academic circles. If we took Engels’s message to heart and recognised our belief in the inherent superiority of pure research for what it is—namely a social prejudice—then we might find among scientists the union

between theory and practice that a world teetering dangerously near the brink so desperately needs.

Note

* Editor’s note: Marx and Engels did not propose that labor was the source of all wealth, as Gould suggests here. Instead, as Marx

wrote in *Critique of the Gotha Program*: “Labour is not the source of all wealth. Nature is just as much the source of use values (and it is surely of such that material wealth consists!) as labour, which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature, human labor power.”

The Most Potent Weapon in the Hands of the Oppressor is the Mind of the Oppressed

Mike Peters

[Bantu Stephen Biko (18 December 1946 – 12 September 1977) was a South African anti-apartheid activist, African nationalist and African socialist. He was at the forefront of a grassroots anti-apartheid campaign known as the Black Consciousness Movement during the late 1960s and 1970s. His ideas were articulated in a series of articles published under the pseudonym Frank Talk. He was tortured to death by the South African police.]

You are either alive and proud or you are dead, and when you are dead, you can’t care anyway.

– Steve Biko

Mention the name of Steve Biko today and, although a few people might recall the 1980 Peter Gabriel song or the 1990 film *Cry Freedom*, many will not know who you are talking about. But this neglect is undeserved, for despite belonging to a specific historical moment—the struggle against apartheid in late 1960s and early 1970s South Africa—Biko’s packed and purposeful life, cut short at the age of 30 in 1977 by the South African Security forces, together with his radical political

ideas, offer us examples of resistance that still have the power to inspire and instruct.

One significant aspect of Steve Biko’s continuing significance is his rejection of liberalism as an effective means of achieving major social change. Convinced that “no group, however benevolent, can ever hand power to the vanquished on a plate”, he knew that hard struggle (but not violent struggle, as his enemies claimed) was always required.

He argued that Apartheid couldn’t be ended by gradually closing of the gap between black and white communities. Oppositional groups and movements must rather become sufficiently strong and independent, so that they are able to engage with those in power as equals. Whilst political strength for us may look rather different than it did then, Biko’s rationale for deciding to form a separate black student group (SASO) in 1968 and face down the charge of ‘reverse racism’ remains ever-topical, where oppressed groups are often accused of the same spurious charge for organising to build power. Building different kinds of oppositional capacity is crucial to political success

because substantial change will only come about when the powerful have their backs against the wall.

As well as rejecting liberalism, Biko rejected simplified versions of Marxism. He believed firmly that (a class-based understanding of) race, rather than ‘simply’ class alone, was at the root of inequality in South Africa and that false consciousness didn’t have to be a permanent state. Indeed, he shared the optimistic and committed outlook of the 1960s’ Black Theology movement, which saw Jesus as a God fighting on behalf of the downtrodden.

Biko recognised that it was essential to challenge Black people’s internalised sense of inferiority and fear, so that they could move to a new identity. For this to happen, he argued, they needed to undergo a process of ‘conscientisation’—a concept borrowed from the Brazilian literacy educator, Paulo Freire, which pointed to how developing individuals’ powers of critical reflection and action can produce fundamental change.

For conscientisation to work properly, Biko believed it was essential for leaders to remain close to those they were assisting, taking serious account of their views.

Otherwise there was a serious risk of reproducing in a different form the authoritarianism and injustices of mainstream society. Oppositional organisations or projects, small and large, need to ensure then that they pre-figure, in their structures and processes, the democratic society to which they are committed.

Worth noting also is the fact that from his early days of political activism, Biko was imaginative about the tactics he used. Hence, at the 1967 meeting of the country's national student organisation (NUSAS), in which black delegates were required to live and eat separately from their white counterparts, he used his homeland language to address the congress at one point rather than English, in order to ridicule its failure to resist the Government's segregation policies.

A year later he was supporting the idea of walking briefly across and back a local boundary line, to subvert the law that stipulated that black people should not reside in certain areas for more than 72 hours. Such actions might seem to be unnecessarily restrained, given the brutality of the South African State, but they chime with the activism of other 60s' movements, such as the Yippies in the US, designed as it was to raise people's awareness of the absurdity of authority.

The BCM also encouraged the growth of cultural activity, whether home-grown or international, to allow marginalised voices to be heard and identities to be strengthened. Little wonder that soul-music's defiant message—"say it loud! I'm black and I'm proud"—became so popular with Black people across the country.

Always extremely articulate, Biko was ready to make use of any platform, including those associated

with the enemy, to gain publicity for his cause. Thus, as a defence witness at the 1975–6 trial of his Black Power Convention colleagues on terrorist charges, he chooses his words carefully, not wanting to incriminate his colleagues but also unable to resist the opportunity to wittily turn the table on his opponents:

Attwell: It is not in the BPC constitution, is it, a rejection of violence?

Biko: No, it is not there. Nor is it anywhere in the constitution of the Nationalist Party.

At other times during the trial, he corrects the Judge and explains his political position with such coherence and force that the authorities must have regretted he was ever given the chance to speak.

A further aspect of Biko's approach to politics was his rejection of sectionalism, for he was always willing to form alliances with other individuals or groups—as indicated by his arrest in 1977 for defying a banning order in pursuit of one such alliance.

Biko believed in the impact that words could make—his superbly written Frank Talk columns in SASO's newsletter are evidence of that. However, although speeches and articles were necessary, activists, he also thought, had to become involved in various kind of community projects. Following the example of Paulo Freire, he encouraged student volunteers to set up literacy classes and to run health-centres and co-operative factories—all of which developed individuals' 'self-reliance' and understanding of the nature of their oppression. The first task of the Zanempilo medical centre was to dispense health-care but the facility also demonstrated to

the black population that they too, as doctors and nurses, could provide as well as receive aid. Community work has a long and honourable tradition in radical politics and the South African experience reminds us of its potential to strengthen political consciousness and to prepare the ground for future struggles.

If the work of Biko and the Black Consciousness movement didn't produce a revolution alone, it did lay the ground for future challenges to South Africa's apartheid system, including the Soweto uprising in 1976 and other forms of unrest and protest. Just as significant, however, is Biko's and the Movement's legacy for today, when the forces of right-wing populism are offering dishonest and inhumane solutions to current problems. It is a legacy that reminds us that the most effective way to fight injustice is to help people see through the myths and lies that are used to keep them in their place, so that they can understand the real causes of their oppression and the power they possess to overcome it. As Biko memorably wrote in 1971: "The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed."

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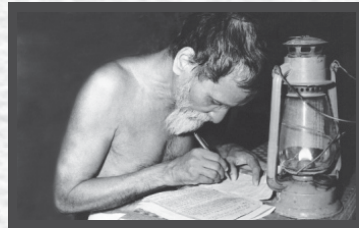
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Email : janataweekly@gmail.com
Website:www.janataweekly.org

Nayantara Sahgal's Speech She Wasn't Allowed to Deliver

Nayantara Sahgal (91) is a renowned Indian writer, and winner of the 1986 Sahitya Akademi Award. She returned her award in October 2015, to protest the "growing intolerance" in the country and silence from institutions like the Sahitya Akademi. She was to inaugurate the 92nd Marathi Sahitya Sammelan on January 11, 2019, but the organisers withdrew the invitation after threats from a political outfit. This is the full text of her speech she was going to deliver.

This is an emotional moment for me and I feel privileged to be here with you. I feel I am standing in the shadow of great Maharashtrians—Mahadev Govind Ranade who founded this sammelan, and whose name is part of the modern history of our country, and the distinguished Marathi writers who have chaired its conventions, and all the writers who have taken part in its sessions and whose writing has enriched the great creative enterprise known as Indian literature.

It is also an emotional moment for me because of my own connection with Maharashtra through my father, Ranjit Sitaram Pandit. I would like to tell you a little about him. He was a Sanskrit scholar from a family of distinguished Sanskrit scholars and he translated three Sanskrit classics into English: *Mudra*

Rakhasa, Kalidas's *Ritusamhara*, and *Rajatarangini*.

Rajatarangini is the 12th century history of the kings of Kashmir by Kalhana, and it had a special fascination for my father because his two great loves were Sanskrit and Kashmir. He worked on this translation during two of his jail terms during British rule and dedicated it to his Kashmiri father-in-law, Pandit Motilal Nehru. His brother-in-law, Jawaharlal Nehru, wrote an introduction to this work when it was published. I am deeply grateful to Dr Aruna Dhere and Shri Prashant Talnikar for their great labour of translating this massive history into my father's—and their own—native tongue, Marathi. I know that nothing would have made him happier.

Both my parents took part in the national movement for freedom under Mahatma Gandhi. My mother, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, was imprisoned three times and my father four times. During his fourth imprisonment he fell seriously ill in the terrible conditions and environment of Bareilly jail, and was given no medical treatment and my mother was not informed how very ill he was. Yet he had refused to ask for his release.

When she was finally informed of his condition she was allowed

to have a 20-minute interview with him. It took place, according to the rule, in the office of the jail superintendent and under his watchful eye, which gave a political prisoner no privacy with his visitor. It shocked my mother to see him brought in on a stretcher. His head had been shaved and his body was emaciated.

She almost broke down at the sight of him but somehow she held back her tears because she knew he would not want her to cry in front of the jailer. He told her why he wouldn't ask for the favour of being released. He said "I have fought with the lions, Gandhi and Nehru. Do you want me to behave like a jackal now?"

She knew she couldn't change his mind so she controlled herself and sat near the stretcher and held his hand, and gave him news of home and the children, and what was growing in the garden he loved. When the government released him at last, it was only to die about three weeks later.

Many years later, after independence, my mother was India's High Commissioner in Britain and sat next to Prime Minister Winston Churchill at a lunch, and he said to her, "We killed your husband, didn't we?" It was an admission that took her by surprise.

Most of you were not born in the 1940s, and you grew up in an independent country, so I have shared this personal story with you to show you the courage and discipline of those times, and the spirit of the men and women who fought for freedom. My parents were among many thousands of Indians—known and unknown, young and old—who committed their lives to that great fight and suffered all kinds of hardship because they had

a passion for freedom. I want to ask you, do we have that same passion for freedom today? Are we worthy of those men and women who have gone before us, some of whom died fighting so that future Indians could live in freedom?

I am asking this question because our freedoms are in danger. The dangers to them are so much on my mind that when I was thinking about what I should say to you, I knew I had to talk about all that is happening in India today, because it is affecting every side of our lives: what we eat, whom we marry, what we think and what we write, and, of course, how we worship.

Today we have a situation where diversity, and opposition to the ruling ideology, are under fierce attack. Diversity is the very meaning of our civilisation. We have old literature in many different languages. We eat different foods, we dress differently, we have different festivals, and we follow different religions. Inclusiveness has been our way of life, and this ancient multi-cultural civilisation whose name is India is a most remarkable achievement that no other country has known. Today it is threatened by a policy to wipe out our religious and cultural differences and force us into a single religious and cultural identity.

At one stroke this policy wipes out the constitutional rights of millions of our countrymen and women who are not Hindus and makes invaders, outsiders and enemies of them. At Independence, our founding fathers rejected a religious identity and had the wisdom to declare India a secular democratic republic, not because they were against religion but because they understood that in our deeply religious country of many religions, only a secular state would provide the overall umbrella of

neutrality under which every Indian would have the right to live and worship according to his or her faith.

The Constituent Assembly which took this decision was made up of a majority of Hindus, yet they drew up a Constitution whose preamble affirmed a life of liberty, equality, and fraternity for all Indians. This high ideal was inspired by Ambedkar, who was the chief architect of the constitution, and a great Maharashtrian whose insistence that all human beings are equal, started a revolution against caste. That high ideal has now been thrown aside. The minorities, and those who don't support the Hindu rashtra agenda, have become targets for fanatics who roam the streets.

We have recently seen five citizens falsely charged with conspiracy and arrested on grounds of sedition. These are men and women who have spent years of their lives working for tribal rights and forest rights, and for justice for the marginalised. Christian churches have been vandalised and Christians are feeling insecure. Lynch mobs are openly attacking and killing Muslims on invented rumours that they were killing cows and eating beef. We are watching all this lawlessness on TV.

In Uttar Pradesh, these mob attacks on the cow pretext have become common, while the authorities stand by and look on. When terrorism of this kind becomes official, as it has in Uttar Pradesh, where can we look for justice? Mob violence backed by the state goes on in many places on defenceless people, and the guilty have not been convicted. In some cases, their victims have been charged with the crimes instead, and in some cases, the criminals have been congratulated. The human cost of

this tragic situation is that it is a time of fear and grief for many Indians who no longer feel safe living and worshipping as they have always done, and have a right to do. The poor and helpless among them—some of whom have been driven out of their villages and their homes and jobs—are living without work, or help, or hope, or future.

I write novels and my material for story-telling has been political. As we writers know, we do not choose our material. We make stories out of the material and atmosphere around us, and because I grew up during the years of the fight for freedom, the values of that time and of the nation it created have been the stuff of my fiction and non-fiction. I have thought of my novels as being about the making of modern India. But because my last two novels are about the times we are now living in, they are about the un-making of modern India.

As we are writers, let us look at what is happening to our fellow writers and artists in this political atmosphere. We are seeing that the questioning mind, the creative imagination, and freedom of expression have no place in the present political climate, and where there is no respect for freedom of thought or for democratic rights, writing becomes a risky activity.

This has always been the case in authoritarian regimes all over the world where art is kept under state control and writers face punishment and persecution if they step out of line.

Take the example of a young poet called Josef Brodsky in Stalin's Soviet Union. Brodsky is arrested and his interrogator waves a paper at him and says, "Do you call yourself a poet? Do you call this a poem? It is not a poem if it makes no

material contribution to the Soviet Union." And he throws Brodsky into jail. Years later, Josef Brodsky wins the Nobel Prize for Literature. Another famous Russian case is of Solzhenitsyn, who was condemned to hard labour in Siberia for many years for criticising the government, and who also won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

And now the same ignorance about art and literature is in action here, and writers are facing the anger of ignorant criticism, and much worse. Three eminent Maharashtrian rationalists, Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare and M.M. Kalburgi, have been shot dead for rejecting superstition in favour of reason, and Gauri Lankesh of Bengaluru for her independent views and her opposition to Hindutva. Others have been threatened with death and forbidden to write. We are told, 'Don't publish your book or we will burn it. Don't exhibit your paintings or we will destroy your exhibition.' Filmmakers are told, 'Change the dialogue in this scene and cut out the next scene or we will not let your film be shown, and if you show it we will attack the cinema hall. Don't do anything to hurt our sentiments'.

In other words, they are saying: do as you are told, or your life and your art are not safe. But the creative imagination cannot take orders from the state, or from the mob. And the question of hurting sentiments is, of course, nonsense. A population of one billion people cannot be made to think alike. Every community has its own views and its own sensitivities on various issues. But sentiments cannot decide what is right or wrong. In some cases it is even our duty to hurt sentiments. If we had been forbidden to hurt sentiments, we would still be burning widows, and no reform of any kind would have

taken place.

Many sentiments were hurt when the Hindu Code Bill was being debated and sadhus threw stones at Parliament house. But if the Bill had not been passed, Hindu women would have had no rights.

Historians are feeling the heat now that Indian history has been brought under state control. In some States, large chunks of the past have been distorted or done away with altogether. And this is the work of Hindutva minds who have been specially chosen to rewrite it. If I were to invent a dialogue between an Indian historian and one of these re-writers of Indian history, it would go something like this. The historian says to the re-writer: 'Akbar won the battle of Haldighati. But in this book, you are saying that he lost it. How come?' The re-writer replies, 'He lost it because I have decided that he lost it. History is what we say it is.' Some of these rewritten textbooks have wiped out the whole Mughal empire, and not content with wiping out the past, all remaining reminders of it are being demolished.

The Babri Masjid has been knocked down, and Mughal and Muslim names of towns and roads are being changed. Some textbooks have censored all mention of Nehru, whose governments laid the foundation of modern India, and Mahatma Gandhi was of course murdered by this mentality in 1948 for the blasphemy of the mantra he gave us: *Ishvar Allah tere nam; Sab ko sammati de Bhagvan*. Gandhi's non-violence is seen as emasculating Indians and making cowards of them. Personally, I think that nothing needed greater heroism than the way unarmed Indians confronted the armed might of an empire. One of my novels called *Lesser Breeds* is my tribute to that unique time.

With all that is being wiped out, so is the scientific frame of mind that we have cultivated since independence. It is being replaced by myths and legends, and a medieval frame of mind.

We have been justly proud of the key institutions we have built up since independence, but they, too, have been brought under state control—whether they concern art and literature, or history, or technology, or science, information, education and culture. Our public universities, our museums and Akademies are no longer independent institutions. The Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in Delhi was an early example of the damage that is being done to our institutions, and Jawaharlal Nehru University is an ongoing target of Hindutva hatred. As a Hindu and a believer in the great enlightened inheritance known as Sanatan Dharma, I cannot accept Hindutva.

In this war that has been declared on diversity, dissent and debate, those who care about freedom have not stayed silent. There are marches and rallies against the destruction of our fundamental rights. There are protests by retired civil servants, by students and academics, lawyers, historians and scientists, Dalits and Adivasis, and the farmers' huge demand for their rights. The large numbers of farmers' suicides in this area show the desperate situation they are no longer unable to face.

The Bhim Army, named after Dr Ambedkar, is making its voice heard, and we are reminded that it has an inheritance of dramatic revolt, when Ambedkar and E.V. Ramasamy Periyar publicly burned the Manusmriti in the 1920s for the insulting and objectionable laws it laid down for Dalits in the caste system, condemning them

to an inferior status. The singer, T.M. Krishna, and the historian, Ramchandra Guha, are among those who have made strong individual protests. Krishna's concert was cancelled and Ram Guha received a death threat. Recently, a great actor, Naseeruddin Shah, has spoken out against the war on Islam and how he fears for his children.

What can writers do in this situation? The answer is: we can write. Powerful fiction has been the result of writers stepping into controversy and taking sides, but not as polemics or propaganda. Their plays and poems and novels have been about people, not ideas, and they have been written by authors who were deeply engaged with the times they were living in, and some are still living in.

Writers don't live in ivory towers. Through our writing, we take sides between good and evil, right and wrong. Great literature worldwide by writers of many nationalities has done this, and this is the literature that has touched chords in succeeding generations and stays alive. We show where we stand by the subjects we choose, the stories we write, and the way we write them. Whether we are writing about our grandmother's cooking, or the rain on the roof, or describing the body of our beloved, every word we write makes it clear where we stand. Writing, like all forms of creative art, is a powerful form of political activism, and it is a means of revolt. That is why dictators are so afraid of it and take steps to control it.

A writers' protest started as an 'Award Wapasi' movement three years ago, when about a hundred of us returned our Sahitya Akademi Awards over the murder of an Award-winning writer, Dr Dabholkar, which the Akademi took no notice of.

But after the lynching of the poor blacksmith, Mohammed Akhlaq, in Dadri village outside Delhi, our movement has grown and widened to cover other issues concerning attacks on democracy and human rights.

I have mentioned the writing of foreign writers. It has left its mark on my mind because I have been able to read some of it in translation. What about Indian writing in our many languages? It is a tragedy that we cannot read each other for lack of translation. Though our music and dance and theatre and films bring us together, our literature keeps us apart, and we cannot know each other until we can read each other. I can only hope that publishers will fill this gap and that Indian literature will become available not only to us but across the world.

I have to pay a special tribute to Maharashtrian women writers, because of the formidable obstacles that women have to overcome when they put their life experiences into words on a page. They run the risk of offending husband, family, and society, and suffering the consequences. May their courage and their creative energy go from strength to strength.

I want to thank my hosts for giving me this opportunity to speak to you, and I have spoken from the heart because of the crossroads our country is at. Which way we go—towards freedom or away from it—will depend, among other things, on what we write, and our refusal to be bullied into silence. In memory of the Indians who have been murdered, in support of all those who are upholding the right to dissent, and of the dissenters who live in fear and uncertainty, but still speak their minds, let us choose freedom.

Thank you for listening to me.

13% Decline in Public Sector Workers in 4 Years of Modi Rule

Neeraj Jain

Nearly 2 lakh workers of government-run public enterprises have lost their jobs since the Narendra Modi led BJP government took power in 2014. The total number of workers declined from about 12.9 lakh in 2014 to 10.9 lakh in 2018. Including the managerial and supervisory staff, the total number of employees has declined from around 16.9 lakh in 2014 to 14.7 lakh in 2018. That implies a total decline of 13% in the workforce in just 4 years.

Within this, the number of regular workers declined from 9.5 lakh in 2014 (March 31) to 7.1 lakh in 2018, as per the latest releases of PES. If you add to that, about 27,289 managerial and supervisory staff that was also made redundant, the total job loss in regular employment is about 2.6 lakh, or a whopping 19.5%.

Simultaneously, number of casual or daily wage workers went up from about 31,000 to over 40,000

while contract workers shot up from 3,08,719 to 3,38,494, between 2014 and 2018. In other words, about 40,000 casual / contract workers were added. The proportion of such employees as a percentage of the total workforce (regular + contract / casual workers) has gone up from 26.4% in 2014 to 34.7% in 2018. This is the period in which the government has given free rein to employers to hire and fire at will by allowing fixed term contract system in all industries.

This data emerges from the annual Public Enterprises Survey (PES) series, brought out by the Department of Public Enterprises.

Surveys have found that contract and casual workers are paid up to 50% less than the regular workers. They are also not given most of the other legal benefits that regular employees get. This leads to enormous “savings” for the employers.

While the greed of private

employers to boost their profits at the cost of workers can well explain these predatory practices, it is bizarre that the government itself is adopting the same measures, in effect holding up these practices as exemplars for others.

Seen with the record-breaking disinvestment of public sector assets—amounting to over Rs 2 lakh crore during the Modi rule—the gutting of what was once India’s pride, the backbone of India’s industrial economy and self-reliance, is clear.

This is one of the key reasons why public sector workers are going on a two-day strike on 8–9 January 2018. The strike has been called by a joint platform of ten central trade unions and dozens of independent federations. One of the key demands of the 12-point demand charter is a stop to privatisation and sale of public sector, while another demand is for increasing employment opportunities.

Table: Break-Up of Total Employees in Public Sector Enterprises, 2014–18

	Contract Workers	Casual Workers	Total Casual + Contract Workers (1)	Total Regular Workers (2)	Total Workers (3)	(1) as % of (3)	Total Managerial + Supervisory Staff
2014	308,719	30,716	339,435	9,48,814	12,88,249	26.35	4,02,492
2015	274,889	21,086	295,975	8,96,469	11,92,444	24.82	3,94,705
2016	267,929	19,103	287,032	8,52,060	11,39,092	25.20	3,81,558
2017	338,521	54,225	392,746	7,60,455	11,53,201	34.06	3,70,385
2018	338,494	40,060	378,554	7,12,937	10,91,491	34.68	3,75,203

(All figures for March 31 of that year.)

(Source: Various PE Survey Reports, Department of Public Enterprises, Government of India, <https://dpe.gov.in.>)

Email: neeraj61@gmail.com

Narendra Modi is Actually the Accidental PM

Sandeep Pandey

Anupam Kher's film 'Accidental Prime Minister' has targeted Dr. Manmohan Singh who served for two terms and may be again acceptable for the job if his party regains power. But his tormentor Narendra Modi seems to be out of breath even before his first term is over. Disillusionment with him is so widespread and deep that people of India may not bear with him for another term. As the general elections approach again, the difference between the two needs to be examined.

Manmohan Singh's government gave this country Right to Information, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee, National Food Security, Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights), Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement, Criminal Law (Amendment) also known as Nirbhaya, Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending), Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Acts. Some benefits of some of these Acts have reached the people, while some are still to yield any results. However, the Narendra Modi government has hardly done anything to benefit the lives of common people. His Jan Dhan Yojna and Ujjwala schemes have come a cropper. While during Manmohan Singh's government you could hear people talking spiritedly about RTI, MNREGA, Forest Rights Act, etc., in Narendra Modi's government one doesn't hear

anybody talking about Jan Dhan or Ujjwala with the same enthusiasm, except for in government sponsored advertisements. Demonetisation, which was really 'remonetisation' as the government brought back bigger denomination notes, betraying the reason that it was meant to be an action against ending black money, and implementation of Goods and Services Tax have made a dent in economy from which it is still to recover. A common perception now is that Narendra Modi–Arun Jaitley have little understanding of the economy and the government has been manipulating data to show better results. The duo was unable to retain competent experts like Raghuram Rajan and Urjit Patel with the government.

Narendra Modi government's biggest failure has been on the law and order front. Hardline elements of Hindutva brigade appear to have had a free hand in perpetrating criminal actions which have terrorised the society at large. While Member of Parliament of Bhartiya Janata Party Raghav Lakhanpal Sharma attacked the residence of Senior Superintendent of Police of Saharanpur in April 2017, various fringe elements attacked Muslim citizens on the suspicion of having consumed beef or simply when they were carrying cattle. Some of these perpetrators were garlanded by central minister Jayant Sinha in Jharkhand. Yogi Adityanath government has indulged in encounter killing of more than fifty people in Uttar Pradesh, and if police is not killing citizens,

then mob is killing policemen in that state. Legislators threaten people who feel insecure under the present dispensation with bombing, something for which a person associated with left wing ideology could be labeled as urban-naxal and put behind bars.

Narendra Modi has probably travelled abroad more frequently and widely than any other PM. However, his foreign sojourns did not do any good to India's relationship with most countries, especially, its neighbours. PM of Pakistan Imran Khan has shown a rare goodwill gesture by opening the corridor to Kartarpur for visit of Sikh pilgrims from India to Darbar Sahib Gurudwara in Pakistan without the requirement of passport–visa. Narendra Modi appears to be caught in anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan politics that his party is traditionally used to. He is not able to grow out of his 56-inch chest size syndrome, declared publicly during last elections, to respond to the friendly overture from our neighbour. On the other hand, it is unclear what the bravado action of surgical strike achieved for India, for cross-border terrorist incidents continue unabated. Relationship with Pakistan during Manmohan Singh's regime had improved relatively; in spite of the terrorist attack on Mumbai, that government did not take an intransigent position of not engaging with Pakistan.

Narendra Modi is constrained to use icons of the freedom movement led by Indian National Congress like Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel and Subhas Chandra Bose to counter the

Nehru–Gandhi dynasty of Congress, as he knows that the ideologues of his parent organisation (the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh), like Hedgewar, Savarkar and Golwalkar, will not go down well with the masses as they were not faithful to the freedom movement of this country. Having formed the government with just 31% of the votes, incidentally the lowest vote share of any party to have won a majority of Lok Sabha seats, Narendra Modi has also deserted some of the RSS agenda like anti-reservation in any attempt to gain wider acceptability.

As the next Lok Sabha election approaches, the Ram temple issue has started dominating the political narrative as if this is an important demand of all Hindus. Since it has been unable to solve none of the major problems facing the country, like farmers' suicides or child malnourishment, unemployment or sub-standard education and health care system, Narendra Modi government is clearly fanning this issue.

People in Kashmir and Assam have become even more disenchanted with the government after the BJP came to power at the Centre. BJP projects itself to be a champion of women's rights when arguing for banning the practice of triple talaq among Muslims but is against the right of Hindu women of menstruating age to enter Sabarimala temple in Kerala. Narendra Modi's estranged wife Jasodaben has been denied a passport lest she cause embarrassment for him abroad.

As if India didn't have enough problems to cope with, the BJP government has added a totally unexpected problem to this list because of its love for the cow. Stray

cattle, which were once domestic but now have no buyers, are roaming around freely destroying standing crops in the fields. This one issue alone may be enough to decisively turn the tide against BJP in the next elections.

All the above-mentioned things point to the fact that Narendra Modi has mismanaged governance much more as compared to the Manmohan Singh government. Narendra Modi consolidated his position after the 2002 Gujarat communal violence by polarising Hindu votes first in Gujarat and then in the whole country. He used false promises to

lure some other sections of society. Ambani and Advani provided him the definite financial advantage over other parties and leaders within BJP. He sailed through in the 2014 elections based on these factors, but now it appears to be an accident to the people of the country. Never before have the people ridiculed any PM with epithets for his false promises like those being used for Narendra Modi, nor has any PM lowered the dignity of his office with actions such as putting on an expensive coat with his name inscribed on it in the form of strips.

Email: ashaashram@yahoo.com

Amid Institutional Decline

Arun Kumar

Allegations of interference in major institutions have been the big news of late. The ongoing fracas in the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has got out of hand, with the two top officials in the chain of command accusing each other of corruption. The recent pronouncements in the Supreme Court do not promise an early resolution.

The fight against widespread graft in the country has been set back. The Deputy Governor of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has highlighted the serious consequences if there is an erosion of its autonomy. The intervention by the Supreme Court in the CBI issue places a question mark on the independence of the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) and the functioning of the government as a whole in making key appointments in the CBI. The CBI controversy has also left an imprint on the Intelligence Bureau

and the Research and Analysis Wing.

The list of institutions in decline is long. The ongoing #MeToo movement has exposed the sordid goings-on in large swathes of the media and the entertainment industry. Earlier too, the Election Commission was under a cloud over the announcement of election dates, action taken against some Delhi legislators and the functioning of electronic voting machines. The functioning of the judiciary itself has been a cause for concern. Then there is the attempt to introduce Civil Service Rules in Central universities, an attempt to erode the autonomy of academics. The crisis in the banking system and the huge non-performing assets that overrun their balance sheets impact the viability of the financial system.

The present and past

The storm is gathering pace. The decline of institutions in India is

not recent. In 2016, demonetisation brought out the centralisation of power and a lack of consultation with important sections of the government. The chaos prevailed for months and about 99% of the money came back into the system, thus defeating the very purpose of carrying out this draconian measure. Those with black money escaped and those who had never seen black money were put to great hardship. The RBI and the banks were marginalised.

The CBI imbroglio is no surprise. Political interference in the agency and corruption among its ranks have been talked about but are hard to prove. The Supreme Court, in 2013, even called the agency a 'caged parrot' but this was not concrete enough. The political Opposition when feeling the heat of various investigations has always accused the agency of being its 'master's voice'. Now that the spat within has come out in the open, with a spate of accusations, these fears have become all the more credible.

A deep rot

The rot has set in deep, with charges of government manipulation in crucial cases. With the Vineet Narain case, in the 1990s, the Supreme Court tried to insulate the CBI from political manipulation by placing it under the supervision of the CVC. But that has not worked since the independence of the CVC itself has been suspect.

Why is the autonomous functioning of the CBI and CVC such an irresolvable issue?

The CBI is an investigative agency largely manned/controlled by personnel drawn from the police force. And this is a force used to

doing the bidding of the ruling dispensation. The rulers themselves commit irregularities in the routine and depend on the police to cooperate with them. The rulers cannot pull them up in their own self-interest.

In the police, there are 'wet' and 'dry' duties where money can be made in the first but not in the second. Being on the right side of the political masters is lucrative. While earlier there may have been few such officers doing political bidding, now it seems they dominate.

It is akin to having a 'committed bureaucracy', an idea floated during the Emergency. The issue is: Committed to whom? To the national interest or to the rulers?

The rule of law is being subverted and illegality being committed on a large scale. Growth of the black economy is a measure of illegality. It has gone up from 4–5% of GDP in 1955–56 to the present level of 62%. It has become 'systematic and systemic' and eroded institutional

functioning all across the board. This has damaged institutions.

Institutions provide the framework for individuals and systems to function. Their breakdown leads to a breakdown of societal functioning—democracy is weakened, the sense of justice is eroded and the Opposition is sought to be suppressed. The tainted not only survive but also get promoted and damage institutions.

If institutions are strong, they are respected and it becomes difficult to manipulate them. It enables the honest to survive. In strong institutions, individual corruption is an aberration but when they weaken, it becomes generalised. It leads to individualisation, illegality becomes acceptable and the collective interest suffers. Even an 'honest' Prime Minister tolerated dishonesty under him. The dilemma is, can a dishonest system be managed honestly?

Email: nuramarku@gmail.com

Some Implications of Verdict on Aadhaar Act

Gopal Krishna

Introduction

While the verdict of the 5-Judge Constitution Bench of Supreme Court on Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY)'s Unique Identification (UID)/Aadhaar number database project being implemented by Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), Aadhaar Act 2016 and indiscriminate metadata collection of Indian residents is 1448 pages long, the portion which is authored by Justice A.K. Sikri is only 567 pages long. This part of the order has been written by him but it has

been signed by 45th Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra and Justice A.M. Khanwilkar. In a separate order, Justice Ashok Bhushan too has expressed agreement with it. The dissenting order of Justice Dr. D.Y. Chandrachud of this 5-Judge Constitution Bench assumes greater significance because it is he who authored the leading order of the 9-Judge Constitution Bench on right to privacy in this very case which had the concurrence of all the judges. A harmonious construction of the verdict of Justice Chandrachud as part of the 9-Judge Bench and

his dissenting order as part of the 5-Judge Bench reveals several inconsistencies in Justice Sikri's order; it becomes evident that latter's order is inconsistent with the order of 9-Judge Constitution Bench. Actually, Justice Sikri's order is inconsistent with his own observations too. It has evaded even those facts, sequence of events and scientific evidence which are on record.

Referring to UID/Aadhaar number database project, Justice Sikri observes: "Its use is spreading like wildfire, which is the result of robust and aggressive campaigning done by the Government, governmental agencies and other such bodies. . . . The Government boasts of multiple benefits of Aadhaar." It may be recalled that the first Chairman of UIDAI used to refer to "robust and aggressive campaigning" as marketing, saying success or failure of UID/Aadhaar depends on its marketing or campaigning. The judge in question recognises that this project is a result of marketing. He carefully uses the word "boasts" with regard to government's claims about its "multiple benefits".

The opening statement of the Justice Sikri authored order reads: "It is better to be unique than the best. Because, being the best makes you the number one, but being unique makes you the only one. 'Unique makes you the only one' is the central message of Aadhaar, which is on the altar facing constitutional challenge in these petitions." This opening statement of the order is questionable from scientific point of view. A report "Biometric Recognition: Challenges and Opportunities" of the National Research Council, USA published on 24 September 2010 concluded that the current state of

biometrics is 'inherently fallible'. That is also one of the findings of a five-year study. This study was jointly commissioned by the CIA, the US Department of Homeland Security and the Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency. Another study titled "Experimental Evidence of a Template Aging Effect in Iris Biometrics" supported by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Biometrics Task Force and by the Technical Support Working Group under US Army contract, has demolished the widely accepted belief that iris biometric systems are not subject to a template aging effect. The study provides evidence of a template aging effect. The study infers, "We find that a template aging effect does exist. We also consider controlling for factors such as difference in pupil dilation between compared images and the presence of contact lenses, and how these affect template aging, and we use two different algorithms to test our data." A "template aging effect" is defined as an increase in the false reject rate with increased elapsed time between the enrollment image and the verification image. This study demonstrates that assumptions which form the basis of Justice Sikri's order are conclusively and unambiguously unscientific.

A report "Biometrics: The Difference Engine: Dubious security" published by The Economist in its 1 October 2010 issue observed: "Biometric identification can even invite violence. A motorist in Germany had a finger chopped off by thieves seeking to steal his exotic car, which used a fingerprint reader instead of a conventional door lock." Notwithstanding similar unforeseen consequences, Justice Sikri's faith in biometric remains unshaken. It seems

that considerations other than truth have given birth to this faith. Is there a biological material in the human body that constitutes biometric data which is immortal, ageless and permanent? Besides working conditions, humidity, temperature and lighting conditions also impact the quality of biological material used for generating biometric data. The claim of uniqueness of UID/Aadhaar which Justice Sikri has accepted is based on the questionable assumption that there are parts of human body like fingerprint, iris, voice, etc. that do not age, wither and decay with the passage of time.

Justice Sikri's order and the report of a Parliamentary Committee

The Forty-Second Report of Yashwant Sinha headed Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance submitted to the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha on 13 December 2011 revealed that "Bharatiya – Automated Finger Print Identification System (AFSI), was launched in January 2009, being funded by the Department of Information Technology, Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, for collection of biometric information of the people of the country." But the same is not being used by UIDAI because according to the Government, "The quality, nature and manner of collection of biometric data by other biometric projects may not be of the nature that can be used for the purpose of the Aadhaar scheme and hence it may not be possible to use the fingerprints captured under the Bhartiya-AFSI project."

Justice Sikri's order refers to the Fifty-Third Report of this very Standing Committee on Finance

that was presented to the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha on April 24, 2012 which summarised the objectives and financial implications of the UID scheme. But his order does not factor in the recommendations of this very Parliamentary Standing Committee in its Forty-Second Report which shows the existence of Bharatiya – Automated Finger Print Identification System (AFSI) whose quality, nature and manner of collection of biometric data was apparently found to be not of such required nature which can impart uniqueness. The Government reached the conclusion that biometric technology of foreign firms is better than the existing Indian one from the point of uniqueness without any comparative study.

This parliamentary report observed, “Continuance of various existing forms of identity and the requirement of furnishing ‘other documents’ for proof of address, even after issue of aadhaar number, would render the claim made by the Ministry that aadhaar number is to be used as a general proof of identity and proof of address meaningless”. It underlined that: “The full or near full coverage of marginalised sections for issuing aadhaar numbers could not be achieved mainly owing to two reasons viz. (i) the UIDAI doesn’t have the statistical data relating to them; and (ii) estimated failure of biometrics is expected to be as high as 15% due to a large chunk of population being dependent on manual labour.” The report records that “The Ministry of Home Affairs are stated to have raised serious security concern over the efficacy of introducer system, involvement of private agencies in a large scale in the scheme which may become a threat to national security; uncertainties in

the UIDAI’s revenue model.”

The parliamentary report has apprehended that: “Although the scheme claims that obtaining aadhaar number is voluntary, an apprehension is found to have developed in the minds of people that in future, services / benefits including food entitlements would be denied in case they do not have aadhaar number.” Its apprehension has been found to be correct.

Parliamentary Standing Committee’s Forty-Second Report relied on the London School of Economics’ Report on UK’s Identity Project, that *inter-alia* states that “identity systems may create a range of new and unforeseen problems . . . the risk of failure in the current proposals is therefore magnified to the point where the scheme should be regarded as a potential danger to the public interest and to the legal rights of individuals.” It records that “the United Kingdom shelved its Identity Cards Project for a number of reasons, which included: (a) huge cost involved and possible cost overruns; (b) too complex; (c) untested, unreliable and unsafe technology; (d) possibility of risk to the safety and security of citizens; and (e) requirement of high standard security measures, which would result in escalating the estimated operational costs.” It states that: “As these findings are very much relevant and applicable to the UID scheme, they should have been seriously considered.”

These aspects of the report have been ignored by Justice Sikri. Although he refers to the introduction of ‘National Identification Authority of India Bill, 2010’ in the Rajya Sabha on December 3, 2010, he chose to gloss over the fact that this Bill was referred to the Parliamentary

Standing Committee on Finance on 10 December 2010 and also the findings of this Committee on this Bill and the UID/Aadhaar project in its Forty-Second Report. This Committee comprised of 21 members from the Lok Sabha and 10 members from the Rajya Sabha. The Bill of 2010 was not a Money Bill. It was never passed by the Rajya Sabha. As a consequence of the recommendations contained in this report, this Bill was withdrawn from the Rajya Sabha on 3 March, 2016 and a new Bill, ‘Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Bill, 2016’ was introduced on that very day as a Money Bill to outwit the Rajya Sabha and to make the recommendations of Lok Sabha’s Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance irrelevant. This itself is enough to conclusively establish this as a questionable legislation. However, Justice Sikri has chosen not to engage with these facts on record.

Conclusion

Citizens’ opposition to UID/aadhaar has a historical context. It is linked to more than a century old world famous ‘Satyagraha’ of Mahatma Gandhi in order to oppose the identification scheme of the government in South Africa. On 22nd August, 1906, the South African government published a draft Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance. The Ordinance required all Indians in the Transvaal region of South Africa, eight years and above, to report to the Registrar of Asiatics and obtain, upon the submission of a complete set of fingerprints, a certificate which would then have to be produced upon demand. The move proposed stiff penalties,

including deportation, for Indians who failed to comply with the terms of the Ordinance. Knowing the impact of the Ordinance and effective criminalisation of the entire community, Mahatma Gandhi then decided to challenge it. Calling the Ordinance a 'Black Act' he mobilised around 3,000 Indians in Johannesburg who took an oath not to submit to a degrading and discriminatory piece of legislation. Biometric aadhaar case demonstrates how 'Those who forget history are condemned to repeat it'.

Biometric profiling is inherently dangerous because it tracks individuals based on their religious, behavioural and/or biological traits.

History is replete with examples wherein such profiling has been used for genocide, holocaust and violence against all kinds of minorities.

In the face of assault on citizens' rights and the emergence of a regime that is making legislatures and judiciary subservient to automatic identification, big data mining and artificial intelligence companies, the order of Justice Sikri seems to have undermined the Constitution and the sovereignty of the citizens who framed it. If the order is not reviewed soon by the Constitution Bench, India's social policies is all set to be guided by biometric and genetic determinism and eugenic thinking of their beneficial owners

of unaccountable and admittedly undemocratic economic institutions. It is not surprising that as of December 2018 some five petitions including one by a defence scientist have been filed praying for review of the Justice Sikri's order. The year 2019 is likely to be the year wherein the Supreme Court's Constitution Bench will determine whether data resource nationalism, constitutionally limited government or anonymous donors of ruling parties must prevail to safeguard citizens' natural rights. By deciding these review petitions, the Court can pave the way for supremacy of democratic social organisations over undemocratic economic organisations.

Email: 1715krishna@gmail.com

60 Years of Defending Cuba Against a Barbarous Empire

Arnold August

When Fidel Castro triumphantly announced the people's victory on January 1, 1959, it had been barely 15 years since the United States had savagely bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This atrocity marked the passage of the baton of barbarism from the inhumanity of World War II to the United States.

Since the devastating atomic bombing, it has been documented that the United States, in its insatiable drive for world domination, has killed more than 20 million people in 37 nations. Innumerable murderous invasions have taken place around the world, such as in Korea, Vietnam and the Playa Girón military intervention that was defeated by Cuba in less than 72 hours. All of this constitutes an uncivilised foreign policy reminiscent of WWII

cruelty. What would have happened to Cuba and Latin America had the Revolution led by Fidel Castro not defeated the US incursion?

As Washington continuously beefs up its economic and military imperial overreach, its ongoing international gunboat diplomacy is now backed up by more than 800 military bases (from giant 'Little Americas' to small radar stations) virtually all over the world, including Guantánamo. All of this foreign policy and more, such as the increasing use of the Internet as the new road to regime change (e.g. in Cuba, especially since 2014), constitute the daily staple of arrogant threats, murderous aggression and cynical interference by the United States.

All of this happens every day

on many occasions through allied states, such as Israel's ongoing slow genocide against the Palestinian people. The post-WWII violation of other countries' sovereignty and international law occurs with virtually no international protection. The blockade against Cuba is a case in point of international impunity. The peoples of the world, such as the Cubans, can rely only on their own forces and support from the peoples and progressive nations in the world struggling to maintain a multi-polar world to resist US domination.

The Cuban Revolution has been curbing the United States for 60 of the 75 years since the inauguration of the 'new face' of the post-WWII barbaric epoch. This period, based on inhumanity to the extreme, shifted from Europe and East Asia

to the United States, only 90 miles from Cuba's shores. Think of this geopolitical and historical reality as people in every corner of the planet reflect today upon the historic significance of the 60th anniversary.

Genocidal Blockade

One can say that the Cuban Revolution has withstood the Empire almost throughout the latter's entire post-WWII lifespan as the successor of the unparalleled cruelty witnessed in WWII, which has always been on Cuba's doorstep in one form or another. This worldwide and historic post-WWII order incorporates an added consequence as far as Latin America and the Caribbean are concerned. This additional feature stems from the US nightmare consisting of the constantly looming and ever-threatening Latin American revolt against colonialism and imperialism since the time of Bolívar and Martí in the 19th century.

The United States has thus added a specific cruel club against Cuba—also targeting its inspirational influence not only in the whole region south of the Rio Grande but in the belly of the beast itself, as Martí called the United States, where he lived and worked. This additional diabolical US measure, imposed just one year after the 1959 triumph, can only be called genocide. Genocide? It is the US blockade itself which defines it as such, while of course not using the word 'genocide.' The blockade, striving to involve all nations, has as its explicit 1960 goal to force the Cuban people into submission through 'economic dissatisfaction and hardship.'

The effects of the ruthless blockade, especially since the implosion of its allies (the Soviet bloc) close to 30 years ago (almost

half the life of the Revolution), have been devastating. Notwithstanding the problems stemming from Cuba's own shortcomings, every day in the life of the Cuban family or individuals is affected by the blockade as the main obstacle to its normal economic development.

Transportation is one daily reminder of the blockade. The procurement and preparation of food constitutes another for the vast majority of Cuban people. Drastic limits to housing renovations that often include frustrating outdated plumbing and electricity is yet another expression of the US siege of Cuba. Health services are deprived of close-by US pharmaceuticals and hospital equipment. Even education, which can be seen as a 'non-material' service, is affected, for example, by the need to import paper for classroom materials, such as books, from far-off lands.

Yet the overwhelming majority of Cubans have not surrendered—and are not surrendering—to the United States, according to Washington's script. The 60-year-old Cuban Revolution stands as firm as it was in its very infancy in the period 1959–61.

Venezuela in US Crosshairs

However, one has to appreciate, on this historic day for the world of January 1, 2019, that no aggressive US policy against the Cuban Revolution is ever discarded. After the fall of the Soviet bloc and the simultaneously planned tightening of the US blockade, which also made it extraterritorial in the wake of this setback in Europe, the United States went for the jugular in the 1990s. Soon after, and with the hope of defeating Cuba once and for all, the United States set Cuba's

closest and most significant ally, Venezuela, in its crosshairs. The Bolivarian Revolution led by Hugo Chávez emerged as the first major reversal of the 1989–91 setback in Latin America, and indeed the world.

Moreover, it happened in what the United States considers its "backyard." When socialism and revolution were supposed to be outdated phenomena of the past, in December 1998, Chávez completed the first step of the long struggle of the resilient Venezuela toward revolution. It was, one could say metaphorically, that 1998–99 comprised Venezuela's 'January 1, 1959.' The United States never accepted the new Bolivarian Revolution in Caracas, as it never swallowed the bitter pill of the Cuban Revolution. This was the case even more so, given that Venezuela immediately after 1989 became a close political and economic ally of Cuba based on mutual benefit.

As the ultimate cynical policy, while making overtures to Cuba for one-and-a-half years before being made public in December 2014, the same Washington declared Venezuela a 'threat to US security' only three months later, in March 2015. This contemptuous Machiavellian policy, so characteristic of ruthlessness for centuries, led to imposing sanctions on Cuba's ally that were designed to cripple it and, of course, as a hoped-for by-product, to squeeze Cuba into submission. This 2015 US Venezuela policy also paved the way for the current US approach of possible military intervention to put an end to the Latin American nightmare come true in the form of the Bolivarian Revolution.

Yet Cuba has been—and is still—heroically resisting, even under these new unfavourable

conditions, as it also goes about forming new economic and trade relations with other countries. Cuba refuses to kneel before the most powerful nation on earth, a stance it has maintained for 60 years. It is a universally recognised fact that Cuba, Fidel Castro, his legacy and followers today have stood up to the United States in defence of Cuban sovereignty. Love it or hate it, there is no escaping this historical fact.

The revolutionary Cuban people have earned their well-derived reputation through blood, sweat and tears and thus deserve the full support of all justice-loving people around the world. Cuba is lacking many goods and material benefits. However, the vast majority of Cuban people, both individually and collectively, benefit from the hard-fought-for blessing of something that we in capitalist countries do not have: dignity. Honour cannot flourish in the capitalist and imperialist West that carries out war, aggression and interference in the name of human rights and democracy denied its very own countries. Dignity in the capitalist West is built only from the bottom up in defiance of capital and the Empire, whose wars of aggression bring shame and dishonour to the peoples of the assailing nations.

As a result of maintaining its sovereignty at all costs, Cuba can work out its plans for the political, economic, social, cultural and other realms based on its own needs and criteria. Over the period of six decades, through the twists and turns, deceptions and successes since 1959, this is what Cuba has been doing. Moreover, on every major step of policy change, it does so with the full participation of the people. Despite the stereotype that

is projected in the West, there is no country in the world that compares with Cuba when it comes to being characterised by debate.

The Political Culture of Debate

This political culture of debate is so entrenched in society that it is an inseparable part of the political landscape. Cubans are clearly used to openly discussing and debating politics. It is a way of life on the island. This tradition goes back to the second half of the mid-19th century, when under Spanish occupation, Cubans discussed and voted for members of four constituent assemblies, which in turn debated, discussed and approved as many constitutions. This took place over 150 years ago while, at the time, the main detractor of Cuba's current constitutional reform—the United States—still had an 18th-century constitution worked out behind closed doors by a handful of slave owners and a wealthy few.

When the Revolution won out on January 1 sixty years ago, Fidel appeared on the balcony of the city hall in Santiago de Cuba to address the crowd in an interactive way. In fact, from that day on, Fidel contributed to the resurrection of the political culture of debate, which had been kept largely in the background by US colonial domination, apart from some short periods, for example, the revolutionary upsurge in the 1930s and the approval of the 1940 constitution.

The political culture of debate, as mutually fostered since 1959 by the new leadership and the humble in favour of the latter, is best captured by Che Guevara: "At the great public mass meetings one can observe something like a dialogue of two tuning forks whose vibrations

interact, producing new sounds." Furthermore, highlighting how the people participated in decision making, Guevara remembers: "Fidel and the mass begin to vibrate together in a dialogue of growing intensity until they reach the climax in an abrupt conclusion." He concedes that "for someone not living the experience," it is a "difficult thing to understand," referring to the "close dialectical unity between the individual and the mass in which both are interrelated." Faithful to his appreciation of the individual's role, Guevara concludes: "The mass, as an aggregate of individuals, interacts with its leaders."

The latest example of this political culture of debate, perhaps one of the most historic since 1959 (even though one would never know it by relying on the corporate press in the West), just took place. Discussions were carried out from August 13 to November 15, 2018 to review the Draft to renew the 1976 Cuban Constitution. In all places of work, educational institutions and neighbourhoods, major changes were suggested. One of the most significant by many Cuban accounts is the issue of the term 'communism.' It was originally contained in the 1976 Magna Carta as the goal of the Revolutionary process but was deleted in the Draft. It came back as a result of the public discussion as a colourful expression of Cuba's political culture of debate, which is so ingrained that no force can smother it. The battle of ideas was waged mainly by revolutionary bloggers and writers.

To sum up the changes, the 1976 Constitution was worded: "... the construction of socialism and the progress toward a communist society." The 2018 Draft submitted

to the people for debate and input was worded: "...toward the construction of socialism." The final December 2018 revised version, which took into account the debate and will be submitted to the citizens in a referendum to be held on February 24, 2019, is worded: "...toward the construction of socialism and communism."

Participatory Democracy Toward Protagonist Democracy?

This latest change in article 5 is no small matter. When the news broke last July 2018 that the Draft eliminated the word 'communism,' the international press in the West yelled victory: 'Cuba gives up communism!' However, the idiosyncrasy of Cuba's political culture of debate put a damper on the euphoria and, at the same time, blew to bits the ongoing media terrorism, namely that 'communism is imposed from above.' As a poetic twist of fate, it came from the grass roots. While the debates were organised at the base and provided the opportunity for every citizen to contribute and argue for their respective views, one had to be very pro-active to raise the 'communism' controversy.

The Draft was, after all, proposed by the entire leadership and the Cuban Parliament. Thus, this latest experience in Cuban democracy went beyond participatory democracy toward protagonist democracy, which, in my view, is a qualitatively higher form of participatory democracy. It is not the first time in Cuba's unique experience in consultation that radical changes came from the grass roots. However, this one on 'communism,' watched by the whole world, is in a class of its own. Thus, on the eve of the celebration of the 60th anniversary

of the Cuban Revolution, this is a very fitting tribute to the Revolution and its architect, Fidel.

Now that the Cuban Revolution has recharged its battery with Fidel's legacy of debate and exchange, it is ready to confront all current attempts by the barbarism of the North and their allies to divide the people and the leadership of Councils of State and Ministers, and to denigrate President Miguel Díaz-Canel. This

desperate attempt to sabotage the movement for renewal based on principles will be responded by a resounding 'Yes' in the February 24 referendum and a vote of confidence for the new Cuban leadership under Díaz-Canel. No force on Earth can smother the Cuban political culture of debate. It can defeat any disinformation and divisiveness by the US-led campaign.

How to React to Stupidity at the Science Congress

Vasudevan Mukunth

Correlation is not causation—but it's really hard to set aside the fact that India's ruling party has empowered a clutch of people to vocalise their pseudoscientific beliefs without fear of ridicule, leave alone consequence. When you hear a person in any kind of leadership position utter unscientific, ahistorical nonsense, you used to be able to laugh and uninhibitedly point out that they're wrong.

And then you read news reports about how people are being arrested for being sharply critical of the prime minister or for innocuous comments on social media targeting ministers and politicians. You read about vice-chancellors, judges and ministers balking at the slightest insult yet freely dismissing reason and civil liberties in single sentences. You keep your Twitter timeline clean to escape the attention of a wandering troll army, many of whose foot soldiers the prime minister himself follows. You watch your language closer than before, almost as if a syntax-obsessed linguist might.

When someone gets on stage and

says something stupid, you no longer see one face. In the visage of G.N. Rao, the Andhra University vice-chancellor asserting at the Indian Science Congress that we had stem-cell technology and test-tube babies thousands of years ago, you see The System glaring down at you. And you swallow the laughter.

But of course, the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and their satellite outfits haven't caused any of this because they haven't actively directed one event after another. What you're seeing is just a correlation, a remarkable coincidence but a coincidence nonetheless. If you think there's causation, then it's in your head, you *liberal, antinational punk*.

So you aren't just silenced. The phantasmal force of the backreaction reaches into you and invites you to reconsider your opinions. Why did G.N. Rao, who sits at the very top of a state university, say what he did? You recoil from the simplest answer: that he's stupid. (He says we had stem-cell and IVF tech because "the

Mahabharat says hundred fertilised eggs were put into hundred earthen pots".) But then he can't be stupid; it must be something else.

Maybe Rao simply meant it as a metaphor—as an allegorical explanation for a complicated subject, something he alludes to in the clip. And maybe Narendra Modi was trying to be funny when he said we had plastic surgery thousands of years ago when we fixed an elephant's head on a human body. Maybe that Rajasthan high court judge was simply illustrating his devotion when he declared peacocks don't have sex but procreate through tears.

Maybe Satyapal Singh was on the cusp of a new philosophy of science when he said monkeys didn't turn into men because his grandparents didn't have a story about it. Maybe Harsh Vardhan was only musing about unknown unknowns when he said Stephen Hawking believed the Vedas had a better "theory" than $E = mc^2$. But wait: the buck stops with the science minister, and when he's crossed the line, it's definitely not a metaphor.

What else could it be? Perhaps the BJP government has thrown the field open to anyone who can craft a call to conservatism in a way that sticks to the *parivar's* ideological line, finds traction among the people and makes news. The best craftsman is then chosen and granted one 'boon', to use Amar Chitra Katha's favourite word for wishes granted by the gods. This franchisee model of nationalist expression would explain former ISRO chief Madhavan Nair's comment that two women entering the Sabarimala temple at night was a "government-sponsored act of cowardice".

Or maybe those of us

discomfited by an ecosystem that quietly tolerates and normalises increasingly offensive statements are in fact the cynics we're often told we are. Cynicism, and the disengagement with public politics that it encourages, is a privilege. Many of us can stop fighting for what we believe is right and shrink into a life no different for it—but most of us can't. At the same time, cynicism is hard to shed when it is consistently rewarded. You decide to hope when the government appoints an excellent principal scientific advisor—and feel snubbed when a senior educational administrator can't see the national science congress as anything more than a spitball range. (And he isn't alone.)

Just like that, we're left navigating a tangled web of excuses we're forced to make for The System if only to avoid confronting the abject incompetence at its

centre. Correlations jump up at us everywhere we look but we resist the cynical temptation to see causes instead.

However, ad hoc judgments are inimical to the everyday practice of reason—more so when a student's vice-chancellor invites her to try. *Don't be a cynic and everything will look better.* But be a cynic and avoid another demonetisation or starvation death. *Don't be a cynic and read meaning into every silly statement.* But be a cynic and think about what G.N. Rao's words might do to the spirit of a student at his university. *Don't be a cynic, be a skeptic instead, and learn to hope.* But be a cynic and prepare to have your hopes dashed.

Don't be a cynic; there are scientists and teachers doing good work in other parts of the country. Let's hope that much continues to stay true.

Rafale Negotiations: PMO Compromised Defence Ministry's Position

M.K. Venu

In what could trigger yet another political storm over the Rafale controversy, fresh facts have surfaced with regard to the procedures adopted by the Narendra Modi government while clearing the purchase of 36 aircraft.

Highly placed sources have confirmed to The Wire that it is officially recorded in government files that the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) was compromising the negotiating position of the defence ministry, which by the end of 2015 was discussing various sensitive aspects of the deal.

What is significant is that the

PMO is named in the internal memos as causing problems to the negotiating position of the defence ministry team. As per procedure, the defence ministry's contract negotiation committee has experts who make a completely independent assessment of the purchase of defence equipment. The committee's decisions and assessments are then sent to the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS).

But here, there are indications that the PMO was trying to make premature interventions.

It is unlikely that these file notings, made by defence ministry

officials, were placed before the Supreme Court. However, it is possible that the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) may have accessed these files.

The national auditor is yet to finalise its own report on the Rafale deal. *The Wire* has learned that while the CAG draft report has raised questions over procedures adopted in executing the aircraft deal, it has steered clear of the pricing controversy and has at this stage made no assessment of the offset contracts given to the private sector.

Sources said the defence ministry's negotiating team, which works under the overall supervision of the Raksha Mantri—Manohar Parrikar, at the time—had reached a critical stage of negotiations for the 36 Rafale aircraft by December 2015.

It may be recalled that after Modi abruptly announced the new deal in France on April 10, 2015,

the Defence Acquisition Council headed by Manohar Parrikar formally approved the 'Acceptance of Necessity' for buying the jets in May 2015.

In the subsequent six months, the actual negotiations had gathered pace.

By December 2015, the negotiations were poised very delicately and the law ministry had noted that a sovereign guarantee from France for the future performance of the Rafale contract was a necessary condition for a government-to-government deal.

Not surprisingly it was in the same month—December 2015—that the defence ministry officially noted that the PMO was compromising its negotiating position.

It seemed that the PMO was interfering at this stage. And this got recorded in an internal memo, according to one highly-placed source with knowledge of the matter.

Then in January 2016, the contract negotiation committee finalised all aspects of the new deal except that the financial terms—the most tricky aspect—was put off by a few months.

Finally, the controversial deal was fully finalised and taken to the Cabinet Committee for Security for clearance in August 2016. There was obviously some resistance from the defence ministry negotiation team to various aspects at various stages.

It is learnt that the increased benchmark price of 36 Rafale jet aircraft—from 5.2 billion euros to 8.2 billion euros—was resisted by many members of the team before being sent to the the CCS. The defence minister at the time neither put his signature on the increased price nor did he sign off on diluting the sovereign guarantee to a mere letter of comfort.

Courtesy: The Wire

Act VIII: Yellow Vests Take Over Streets Across France

Yellow vest protesters, who are demanding social justice in France, came out on Saturday, January 5 for their 8th massive mobilisation. Dwindling numbers during the holidays generated fears that the movement had waned, but after dinners and family gatherings, the people of France have retaken the streets.

At least 18 people have been arrested so far.

Protesters gathered in several points in Paris to later march to the National Assembly. As people gathered in the Champs-Élysées and the historic stock exchange, demonstrators called for Macron's resignation and warned him the mobilisation is not a revolt, "it's the

revolution."

"100 billion in tax evasion, no measures," one protester denounced in a clear reference to the grass-roots movement for fiscal justice.

On Friday, the French government dismissed yellow vest protesters as agitators whose only goal was to topple it. The popular uprising that began with a rejection to a fuel tax has transformed into a movement for fiscal justice that has demanded President Emmanuel Macron, known to many as the "president of the rich", to step down.

After President Macron's first cabinet meeting of the year, during which he insisted law and order must be restored, government spokesman Benjamin Griveaux told reporters:

"The yellow vest movement, for those who continue to protest, has become the thing of agitators who promote insurrection to topple the government."

It's not the first time the French government has dismissed yellow vest protesters. In November, when mobilisations began, Macron called them thugs. However, in mid-December, after weeks of protests, the president was forced to make concessions, including the elimination of the controversial fuel tax, a raise in the minimum wage, and tax cuts for pensioners.

"We must take the desire of the French for change to its fullest because it is this desire which brought us to power. . . . Maybe we

have made too many concessions to conservatism, we'll have to change that," Griveaux said. However, it is not conservatism that has sparked protests but Macron's anti-working class reforms, including a sweeping labor reform and pension reform.

Since Macron came to power in May 2017 he has seen his popularity slide to a record low as discontent with his policies grew.

According to a poll released on January 4, 55 percent of French people want the yellow vests to continue protesting.

Yellow Vest Women March Throughout France

And on Sunday, January 6, women "yellow jackets" all across France mobilised to show to the media that only reports violent events that the movement is essential peaceful.

Over 50,000 women gathered in front of the Place de la Bastille and in the Place de la République, in Paris, and others came together in Caen, Montceau-les-Mines, and Toulouse to demonstrate against President Emmanuel Macron's austerity measures, including an increase in gas prices that the president eventually withdrew after months of previous street demonstrations.

Women in Toulouse marched with a large banner demanding Macron's resignation. "Macron, if you do not come, we will come for you", read some of the protest banners. "Macron your goose is cooked, the chicks are in the street," read other signs.

In Paris, women sang France's national anthem at the Bastille before marching through nearby streets.

Courtesy: Telesur

Massive Rallies, Angry Protests Mark Two-Day Countrywide Strike

Issuing a clarion call against the Modi government, an estimated 20 crore people from organised sector, both public and private, including workers working in multinational companies, scheme workers and the unorganised sector successfully carried out a two-day nationwide strike on January 8-9. They were protesting against the "anti-labour, anti-people and anti-national policies" of the BJP-led Central Government.

The strike was a part of the programme adopted by the National Convention of Workers, called jointly by ten central trade unions in September 2018. The RSS-affiliated Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) is the only central union that did not participate in the strike action.

The unions called the strike because the Modi government has been ignoring their 12-point charter of demands that raises issues of unemployment, price rise, minimum wages, pension, increasing contractualisation, disinvestment, universal social security cover, strict compliance with labour laws and FDI.

The strike saw joint trade union rallies in every state capital and even in district centres across the country. In the national capital, Delhi, workers, students and youth marched from Mandi House to Parliament Street, raising their 12-point charter of demands. Employees and teachers in Delhi University and teachers and students of Jawahar Lal Nehru University also went on strike in solidarity and joined the rally. Due to the workers strike, industrial areas in and around

Delhi NCR region came to a grinding halt. Even multinational companies such as Coca Cola, Toyota, Volvo, Samsonite, Crompton, CEAT, etc saw a complete shutdown.

The banking and insurance sector came to a standstill all across the country during the strike. Electricity generation and distribution, coal extraction and movement, non-coal mining, iron ore mining and steel production, got affected since the workers actively responded to the strike call. Oil extraction, refining and marketing, along with LPG in entire Eastern and Northern sector was completely paralysed. Even supply of aviation fuel was affected, resulting in cancellation of many flights. Transport sector, including road and rail, was affected resulting in cancellation of many trains. Railway workers and defence sector employees joined in solidarity everywhere.

In Maharashtra, the two-day strike was marked by rallies, dharnas, human chains, rasta roko protests, rail roko protests, torchlight processions at night and even people's poetry recital before the collectorate. BEST, the Mumbai city road transport service provided by the Municipal Corporation, recorded complete close down.

Kerala, Assam, Odisha, Puducherry, Manipur and Meghalaya witnessed a complete shutdown during the strike. While Goa and Bihar, which were on industrial strike on January 8, experienced a bandh-like situation during the second day. The district centres in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh

were impacted.

In Tamil Nadu, a highly industrialised state, huge demonstrations were conducted in many pockets; unions from various sectors like transport, postal, banking, IT, etc. participated in the strike; many students and youth organisations also came out in solidarity with the striking workers. In Bengal, the strike remained largely effective across the state. At Lal Chowk in Srinagar, hundreds of activists of various unions across Kashmir thronged to stage a protest in support of the general strike.

Courtesy: The Wire, Newslick

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Letter to Editor

Opposition Should Revive Neglected Agenda of Planning

As the election season approaches, the opposition is rightly sharpening its criticism of many misdeeds of the Modi government. Unfortunately, the dismantlement of Planning Commission and the discarding of the entire planning process including preparation of five-year plans has not received adequate attention even from major opposition parties, particularly the Congress.

Does this mean that the Congress and some of the other leading opposition parties are also not adequately concerned about this issue? If true, this is very sad, because the need for planning is even more in these uncertain times of global uncertainties and catastrophic possibilities led by climate change. The Congress should have firmly

opposed the dismantling of the Planning Commission by the Modi regime, educated the people about the importance of this issue and made this a big election issue.

In fact it is still not too late to do so. At least the left parties can be expected to make this an issue, but this will become more effective if the Congress and its allies also accord adequate importance to this issue. These opposition political parties should include re-initiation of five-year plans and re-establishment of a reformed Planning Commission in their election manifesto. Public pressure should be exerted on opposition parties well before the general elections due next year to ensure this.

Email: bharatdogra1956@gmail.com

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Footprints of A Crusader (The Life Story of Mrunal Gore)

by

Rohini Gawankar

Published by

Kamalakar Subhedar

Secretary,
Samata Shikshan Sanstha,
Pareira Wadi,
Mohili Village,
Sakinaka, Ghatkopar (W),
Mumbai 400 072.
Mobile : 9820092255
Contribution : Rs. 300+

Young India Adhikar March, February 7, 2019

**Join the Young India Adhikar March on 7th February
from Lal Qila to Parliament Street, New Delhi!**

Representatives of Student and youth organisations from all over the country met in JNU, Delhi on December 27, and decided to form a platform, the 'Young India National Coordination Committee' to fight the anti-student and anti-youth policies of the Modi Government. They decided to organise a Young India Adhikar March in Delhi on February 7. The statement issued by them says:

"The last five years of Modi regime has seen systematic destruction of public funded school and higher education, massive budgetary cut in education and brazen misuse of power to benefit private educational institutions (Jio University model). On the other hand, while unemployment has skyrocketed, they have only tried to feed the youth with fake propaganda and fill them with communal hatred. Students and Youth across the country have organised brave movements to fight back against these sinister and divisive policies of the government since its initial days. As the Lok Sabha elections approaches near, it is imperative to unite in order to install the student-youth agendas at the heart of national politics. With this intention, student-youth movements, union members and organisations from across the country have come together and formed a Young India National Coordination Committee (YINCC). We will reach out to the student and youth in every corner of our country and bring them to flood the streets of Delhi on 7th February and ensure that

education and dignified employment becomes the biggest agenda of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections."

Student-Youth Charter of Demands:

- Fulfill All Vacant Positions in All Departments before 2019 Elections; End Contractualisation of Jobs!
- End the Regime of Paper Leaks and Corruption in Every Recruitment Exam!
- Right to dignified employment should be recognised as fundamental right! Ensure unemployment benefit at least at the rate of minimum wages (Rs 18,000 per month).
- Stop Scuttling Reservations; Guarantee Reservations for Socially Deprived Sections in Private Sector as Well!
- The Private Sector Must Be Held Accountable to Stop Rampant Harassment and Firing of Employees!
- Stop the Policy of School Closure in the Name of Merging; Develop the Nearest Government Schools into Neighborhood Schools Open to All Children in the Neighbourhood, and Improve their Quality, to Ensure Universal Enrolment and Universal School Education till Class 12!
- Stop Destroying Public Funded Education!
- Open 100 new Central Universities with proper infrastructure;
- Spend at least 10 % of the GDP on Education!
- Roll Back Policies like Graded Autonomy, Institute of Eminence and HEFA Which Only Push Commercialisation and High Fee Structure in Education!
- Scholarship / Fellowship should be recognised as a right. Ensure proper scholarships / fellowships for all.
- End Gender Discriminatory Rules in Universities; Establish Gender Just Anti-Sexual Harassment Cells in All Campuses and Work Places!
- Waive off All Student Loans Unconditionally.
- End Institutionalised Discrimination. Enact Rohith Act!
- Withdraw all Politically Motivated Charges against Student Activists in Campuses!
- Restore Democratically Elected Student Unions in All Campuses across the Country.

Issued by:

- Young India National Coordination Committee

Facebook Page:

- <http://fb.me/YoungIndiaAdhikarMarch>;
- Twitter Handle: @YoungIndiaMarch ;
- Contact: 7042952053, 9968787242

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The Retrial of Godse: Forgetting the Facts

Apoorvanand

I imagine you believe that he was for the most part adored; in fact he was hated and he is still hated today. Hatred is still alive in India and he died of it. But the simple fact that he lived according to his own law—which was ascetic and demanding of himself was something people could not tolerate. French writer Hélène Cixous turns to Gandhi to compare his life with the ways of writing that “may hurt, may dissatisfy and give the feeling that something is taken away.” Gandhi’s life, like the rigorous writings of Clarice Lispector, Jean Genet or Marina Tsvetaeva, was a continuous exercise or struggle to live his life his own way, evolve a living principle that unsettled and embarrassed.

Gandhi’s first test of sacredness was the ability to clean the night soil of others. Similarly, he befriended the British while fighting against their unjust rule in India, reminding them that their stay in India was unethical by their own standards. He was a deeply religious man, refusing to separate politics from religion, and yet imagined a nation not based on the principles of any faith and chose the agnostic, if not irreligious, Jawaharlal Nehru as his successor. For this decision, his

disciples started hating him secretly. He declared that India would be partitioned over his dead body and yet asked the government of India to honour its commitment by giving Pakistan its share of assets from the treasury of undivided India.

This is the charge repeatedly brought against Gandhi—why did he not die for the “Akhandata” of Bharat, and why did he keep insisting that Pakistan be dealt with humanely? We are asked to understand and appreciate the decision to put him to death for his stubborn act of trying to help an enemy nation when it was at war with us. There is a widespread feeling that India would have achieved a much neater and cleaner self-identity as a nation, save for Gandhi’s insistence on equal status for Muslims and Christians living in a nation of Hindu majority. Gandhi is blamed for the confused Indian identity, or for making it “unclean”.

He had to die, then. Just 12 days before his final moments, he had returned from the verge of death. On January 18, 1948, Gandhi broke the fast he had commenced on January 13, as he could not bear to live in a Delhi where he could move around with ease but his

friends Zakir Hussain and Shaheed Suhrawardy were not safe. He could not allow his fellow Hindus to take over the properties of Muslims and drive them out, capture mosques and turn them into temples. Hatred was flowing on the streets of Delhi. Gandhi knew that it was a “do or die” moment for him. D.G. Tendulkar writes in his masterly biography of Gandhi, *Mahatma*: “We are steadily losing hold on Delhi,” Gandhi mentioned to a friend. “If it goes, India goes and with that goes the last hope of world peace.” He found that his appeal for peace and understanding had no takers. He felt that he had no other way but to put himself on trial once more, this time to protest against the wrong done by his society.

Delhi was sheltering Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan who had lost everything and had suffered the worst kinds of atrocities. To ask them to vacate Muslim properties was an audacious demand. Muslims in Delhi had left their colonies and taken shelter in Purana Qila and Jama Masjid.

Gandhi said about his fast, “It will end when and if I am satisfied that there is a union of hearts of all communities brought about without any outside pressure but from an awakened sense of duty.” Gandhi was very clear about the nature and objective of his mission. He said that he was fasting on behalf of Muslims in India and Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan, that he would rather die than be a helpless witness to the destruction of Hinduism, Sikhism and Islam. This destruction was certain if Pakistan ensured no equality of status and security to people professing various faiths, and if India copied Pakistan.

The fast excited contradictory

passions. Slogans like *Marta hai to Marne do* (Let him die) were heard. He was criticised for undertaking a pro-Muslim fast. Gandhi was unwavering. He patiently dealt with all objections to his fast. But it also forced people to look inward and examine themselves. The fast did generate a lot of goodwill but it also hardened the hatred against him. A day before his killing, a group of refugees came to see him and some of them abused him, holding him responsible for their woes, and asked him to leave them to their miseries and retire to the Himalayas. Gandhi said that his Himalaya was always with him.

Is it surprising that there is no memory of this fast available though our school textbooks, which shun the mention of his killing by a man who was not mad at all? Why is it that schools take their young to Rajghat but seldom think of visiting Birla House, where he was killed? It was not surprising at all that, when the University of Delhi decided to have a course on him, it carefully avoided

everything that could be linked to his politics and did not even mention his killing. Is it because the killing of a Hindu by another purer, masculine Hindu embarrasses us? Why have Gandhians been only singing bhajans on this day, never daring to touch the real issue, the killing of Gandhi? Why do we not want to face this moment? Is it because there is no national consensus on how to describe the death? Is it because we want to evade the “why” part of it?

Long after his death, the act of “disembowelling” Gandhi continues. The “abominable” part of him is being removed.

We are trying to get rid of the Gandhi who keeps challenging us and want a Gandhi who, with his bhajan, would put us to sleep. But Gandhi was an eternal rebel. This rebellious Gandhi needs to be rescued. As a first step, we need to visit the moment of his death and gather the courage to face the ghost of Gandhi, who still wanders inside Birla House.

Email: katyayani.apoorv@gmail.com

Benami Voters and Laundering Elections with Aadhaar

Dr. Anupam Saraph

The use of Aadhaar by governments fits the classical definition of electoral malpractice as it constitutes manipulation of electoral processes and outcomes so as to substitute personal or partisan benefit for the public interest. Such malpractice threatens the integrity of an election as it is extensive, systematic and decisive.

Electoral Malpractice

Sarah Birch, author of *Electoral*

Malpractice, defines electoral malpractice as the manipulation of electoral processes and outcomes so as to substitute personal or partisan benefit for the public interest.

Does the Aadhaar linkage to the voter ID or the use of Aadhaar to deliver subsidy, benefits and services constitute electoral malpractice?

The then chief election commissioner, OP Rawat, does not appear to have asked this question when he declared in March 2018 that

32 crore Aadhaar numbers had been already linked to voter ID cards.

The government has been insisting that Aadhaar is necessary to target subsidies, benefits, and services and do direct benefit transfers to beneficiaries since the creation of Aadhaar in 2009.

The web portals of the chief electoral officer of various states have been providing voters the ability to link Aadhaar to Voter IDs. The Election Commission has also been linking Aadhaar numbers to voters ID in different states through a process of seeding Aadhaar numbers from other databases. At least till November 2017, Aadhaar could be linked to voters' ID cards.

Benami Voters and Voter Exclusion

Electoral rolls are revised under Rule 25 or corrected under Rule 26 of the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960. The process allows for filing of claims for inclusion and objections to the inclusion of anyone under Rule 13.

It also allows for the inclusion of persons inadvertently omitted (Rule 21) and deletion of persons who have died, or are not residents in the constituency, or not entitled to be registered (Rule 21A). This process is meant to ensure that each person on the rolls is a real person and a genuine voter.

What are the consequences of the use of Aadhaar for revision or correction of the rolls under Rule 25 or 26?

Section 4(3) of the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016 declares "An Aadhaar number, in physical or electronic form subject to authentication and other conditions, as may be specified by regulations,

may be accepted as *proof of identity* of the Aadhaar number holder for any purpose" [emphasis mine].

It is evident that the Aadhaar may not be used as a proof of address, age, gender or relationship. It is also evident that there is no authority with which Aadhaar becomes a proof of identity either. Section 9 of the Aadhaar Act declares "The Aadhaar number or the authentication thereof shall not, by itself, confer any right of, or be proof of, citizenship or domicile in respect of an Aadhaar number holder." However, the Aadhaar is currently used as a proof of age during enrolment as a voter.

With a view to preventing impersonation of electors and facilitating their identification at the time of poll, Rule 28(2) of the Registration of Electors Rules, requires the Election Commission to issue to every elector an ID card that is certified by the registration officer.

Unlike the Voter ID, that is certified by the registration officer in accordance with Rule 28(3)(d), the Aadhaar 'card' or the biometric or demographic data associated with any Aadhaar number is not certified by the UIDAI. Unlike the process of revising the electoral rolls, there is no process of revising Aadhaar database. In fact, there is no process for objecting to assigning an Aadhaar number to any combination of biometric or demographic data in the Aadhaar database. In the absence of such a process to clean the database, no verification or audit of the Aadhaar database has happened either.

Linking a biometric with each Aadhaar number has created impression that there has to be a unique entry of each enrolment. This is clearly not the case as the UIDAI does not have any information about

the number of unique biometrics in its database. The UIDAI also indicates that it cannot retrieve a unique record with a biometric. This means that the UIDAI cannot guarantee that it has no duplicates or ghosts.

Almost all Aadhaar numbers are supposed to have been issued on the basis of other primary documents of proof of identity and proof of address. The UIDAI however has no information about the primary ID used, making it impossible to allow the verification of the uniqueness and validity of a Aadhaar number by anyone who uses it.

According to the Affidavit dated 30.10.2017 of UIDAI to the Supreme Court, at most 60 crore persons could have been issued an Aadhaar assuming everyone used the Election Photo Identity Card as one of their primary identification documents. No other combination of primary identification documents allows to generate even as many Aadhaar. At least 58.64 crore Aadhaar of the 118 crore numbers issued by the UIDAI are, therefore, duplicates and ghosts.

Furthermore, according to the CEO of UIDAI, 48% of the Aadhaar numbers have never participated in iris or finger matching. It is evident that Aadhaar is the worlds largest database of ghosts and duplicates. The use of these ghosts and duplicates gives rise to benami or fake identities and transactions.

With the dilution of KYC by the Reserve Bank of India in January 2011, it became possible to use Aadhaar as the sole basis for creating a bank account.

Aadhaar has also been widely used as the means to issue other primary IDs like passports, PAN cards, instant PAN and driving licenses.

This means that the continued use of Aadhaar can easily generate documents that serve as proof of address for Form 6 to apply for inclusion in Electoral Roll or for shifting from one constituency to another.

The use of Aadhaar as a proof of identity, proof of address or proof of age anywhere by the government, allows compromising the enrolment of voters in the Electoral Rolls. It allows the inclusion of benami voters in a manner that is difficult if not impossible to weed out.

The mandatory creep of voluntary Aadhaar has caused the exclusion of millions from accessing their rights. Millions have been deprived from birth certificates, school and college admissions, giving examinations, qualifying for interviews, getting jobs, receiving salaries, accessing healthcare, getting PAN cards, ration cards, water bills, electricity bills, gas connections, driving licenses, claiming pensions, and even a dignified burial and death certificates. This means people are even being denied not only the goods and services but also the primary identification documents that they otherwise could have, as well as their ability to enrol as a voter.

Those whose Aadhaar fails on authentication due to biometric change, technology failure or any other reason are also excluded. Even more serious is UIDAI's ability to deactivate Aadhaar numbers under section 23(g) of the Aadhaar Act. Deactivated Aadhaar numbers will allow automatic deletion of voters from beneficiary databases, including Electoral Rolls.

The use of Aadhaar to discover and delete duplicate or ghost entries has also allowed the exclusion of legitimate voters by treating those

without an Aadhaar or those whose Aadhaar information does not match as ghosts or duplicates. In Telangana alone, 2.2 million people were reportedly dropped from voter rolls, after Aadhaar based "verification" was done in 2015.

The use of Aadhaar to onboard, modify or purify electoral rolls is illegal, causes the inclusion of benami voters and excludes millions of legitimate voters. Furthermore, its use cannot be harmonised with the requirements of the Registration of Electors Rules or rule 35 and 49 of The Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961.

Targeted delivery as electoral malpractice

In 2018, there was outrage across the world as Cambridge Analytica, a private company providing services to political clients, helped influence voters by targeting messages to voters based on their psychometric profiles. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg was grilled by the US Congress for enabling such psychometric profiling through the Facebook ecosystem.

Targeted delivery of subsidies, benefits and services is worse than targeted messaging to win elections. It is control of the electorate to ensure votes.

Part of the cost of providing a good or service to a beneficiary that is paid by the government is a subsidy. For seven decades, the government has delivered subsidies, benefits and services by providing beneficiaries access to subsidised food grains, cooking fuels, medicines, health services, education, seeds, fertilizer and other benefits and services. This has been accomplished by each ministry or department through its own

empowering legislation that defines the beneficiaries of its subsidies and the delivery mechanisms. This is done without prejudice to the constituency or political vote of the beneficiary.

In fact, traditional mechanisms of delivering subsidies, benefits or services provide no means to target a voter or a constituency. This traditional process cannot target only those who vote for the ruling party and exclude those who do not vote for the ruling party. Neither can the traditional process create the illusion of delivery of subsidised goods or services as the subsidised physical good or service is made available to beneficiaries. It cannot manipulate a beneficiary list as each ministry or department's delivery process is subject to physical verification and audits.

Targeted delivery, using Aadhaar, allows the inclusion or exclusion from benefits of persons from within a constituency. Linked to voter ID, it allows the inclusion or exclusion of voters. For inclusion of persons into beneficiary lists, their Aadhaar is seeded to beneficiary lists. Such included Aadhaar numbers are not subjected to certification, verification or audit of their real identity, qualification as beneficiary or even their receipt of the benefit. Neither the department, ministry, nor the UIDAI take any responsibility of the delivery to the rightful beneficiary anymore.

For exclusion of persons from beneficiary lists, their Aadhaar is de-seeded, seeded to benami Aadhaar numbers, deactivated or its authentication is caused to fail. The UIDAI takes no responsibility for the delivery and, in fact, it is an ecosystem of private players who can decide the inclusion and

exclusion of benefits.

Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT) replaces the physical delivery of benefits by money transfers, of part of the cost of providing a good or service, to a bank account assumed to be that of a beneficiary. This means there is no longer any physical verification or audit of the subsidies. Prior to dilution of KYC by the Reserve Bank these bank accounts could not be opened by Aadhaar ghosts and duplicates. After the Department of Revenue regularised eKYC as a valid process for opening bank accounts, it became possible to regularise bank accounts opened merely by using Aadhaar numbers without any physical presence of the account holders.

Bankers across the country have disclosed, on condition of anonymity, that they have been subject to coercion by local political forces to open thousands of bank accounts in their branches solely with Aadhaar. The Jan Dhan accounts is one such category of bank accounts that are not verified as to whether they belong to real persons or as within the control of a beneficiary that they claim to bank. The beneficiaries receiving DBT to these bank accounts become virtual. The bank account becomes a surrogate for the beneficiary.

In February 2012, the Nandan Nilekani led Task Force on an Aadhaar-Enabled Unified Payment Infrastructure pushed for money transfers to Aadhaar numbers instead of bank accounts. This replaced the process of government payments to bank accounts of beneficiaries electronically through the Reserve Bank of India's national electronic funds transfer (NEFT) with payments to Aadhaar numbers using Aadhaar Enable Payment Systems

(AEPS) created and run by a non-government private organisation, the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI). According to Nilekani, who has been advising the NPCI, in violation of section 16 of the Aadhaar Act, over Rs 95,000 crore were transferred to beneficiaries in 2017-18 using AEPS.

The transfer of DBT using AEPS creates virtual and benami beneficiaries who become untraceable. For example, in April 2017, more than 40,000 DBT transfers to persons who were not beneficiaries of part of drought relief for farmers in Karnataka took place. Similar transfers have been reported across the country. Similarly Aadhaar eKYC and Aadhaar payments allowed Rs 168 crore LPG subsidy to be siphoned into 37 lakh bank accounts in Airtel Payments Bank. This enables subtle yet very large scale money laundering for election funding across the country.

This use of Aadhaar clearly constitutes corrupt practice under section 123(1), 123(2), 123(3), 123(6), 123(7) and 123(8) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

Laundering elections

The biometric and demographic data associated with Aadhaar numbers are not certified by the UIDAI as belonging to the person who is being authenticated. It has been shown repeatedly that both the biometric and demographic data associated with the Aadhaar number can be changed by both legitimate and illegitimate processes outside the control of the UIDAI or anyone relying on using them.

Neither the UIDAI, nor anyone relying on Aadhaar, have any way of guaranteeing consistent, legal valid,

risk free outcomes with Aadhaar. Aadhaar is a Trojan horse that allows private interests to take control the outcome of elections.

It is evident that creating benami voters, excluding real ones, targeting subsidies to select voters, excluding select voters from subsidies, benefits and services, and laundering funds from the Consolidated Fund of India into benami bank accounts using untraceable money transfers are subtle and undetectable means for private interests to seek to alter the voluntary choices made by voters at the polls. The use of Aadhaar as a proof of identity by anyone citing section 4(3) of the Aadhaar Act is, therefore, sufficient to launder elections.

The use of Aadhaar by government fits the classical definition of electoral malpractice as it constitutes manipulation of electoral processes and outcomes so as to substitute personal or partisan benefit for the public interest. Such malpractice threatens the integrity of an election as it is extensive, systematic, and decisive.

The Election Commission of India is charged with unprecedented circumstances to exercise its powers in order to dismantle the extensive and systematic way in which the electoral mandate and the sovereignty of the people is being destroyed.

Email: anupamsaraph@gmail.com

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Whither Bangladesh

Mrinal K. Biswas

At the end of the post-poll cooling-off period, the Awami League set in motion the business of governance in Bangladesh. The decimation of the entire opposition in the elections gives the impression that the opposition is virtually non-existent in Bangladesh, but this is not actually true.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the Awami League gave little leeway to the opposition by systematically undermining its opponents, taking advantage of its control over the government. During her first term as the Prime Minister (1996-2001), Sheikh Hasina brought the assassins of her father Sk Mujibur Rahman and his family members present at Dhaka on 15 August 1975 to trial. Only a few could flee abroad. Some of the accused were acquitted, while five of the accused were sentenced to death and executed on 28 January 2010. After winning elections and becoming Prime Minister again in 2008, Sheikh Hasina set up an International Crimes Tribunal, a domestic war crimes tribunal, in 2009 to investigate and prosecute suspects for the genocide committed in 1971 by the Pakistan Army and their local collaborators, Razakars, Al-Badr and Al-Shams during the Bangladesh Liberation War. Consequent to the trials, some of the accused were executed and some others given life terms. Among those indicted were two leaders of the opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP) and nine leaders of the Islamist fundamentalist party Jamaat-e-Islami, which had opposed independence in 1971.

The Awami League again won the Bangladesh elections held on 30 December 2018. After taking oath of office as Prime Minister for the fourth time on 7 January this year, Sheikh Hasina has expressed her desire to set up a special commission to identify and punish those who were behind the killings of four national leaders closely associated with Mujibur Rahman. These four, Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmad, M Mansur Ali and AHM Quamruzzaman, were all founding leaders of the Awami League and had been arrested and murdered in jail on November 3, 1975, three months after Sheikh Mujibur's assassination.

The divide between Sheikh Mujib's followers and other heroes of Bangladesh's liberation struggle took some strange twists and turns in course of time. In the elections held in 2018, the BNP—which was founded by Ziaur Rahman, an army general turned politician who was one of the leaders of Bangladesh's freedom struggle—formed the Jatiya Oikya Front (National United Front or NUF), comprising primarily of four parties, to challenge Hasina's bid for power for the third time in succession. Despite the Jamaat having opposed the freedom struggle, the NUF allowed Jamaat-e-Islami candidates to stand for elections on the NUF symbol (in 2013 the Jamaat-e-Islami was banned from registering and therefore contesting in elections by the High Court, on the ground that its charter was in violation of the constitution).

Despite the alliance with the fundamentalist Jamaat, hope for

a truly secular and democratic alternative emerging in Bangladesh had been generated when Dr Kamal Hossain, with his impeccable records of political and judicial achievements, agreed to become the convener of NUF. This octogenarian leader had left the Awami League in 1992 after differences developed between him and Sheikh Hasina to set up a small political party, Gano Forum, along with some star figures in the Bangla liberation movement. He is widely regarded as an icon of secular democracy in South Asia. Dr Hossain was close to Sheikh Mujib, had defended him in the Agartala Conspiracy Case in 1960s, was imprisoned along with Sheikh Mujib in West Pakistan during the war of independence, and became Foreign Minister after Bangladesh was born. However, during the 2018 elections, despite his popularity and secular and democratic image, the NUF campaign never really took off. The Gano Forum did not have many foot soldiers. Prime Minister Begun Khaleda Begum's BNP is the most important constituent of NUF, but due to her imprisonment on graft charges and with her son and acting BNP chairman Tarique Rahman living in exile in London for many years, the BNP was virtually a non-starter in the election battle. Moreover, the BNP rank and file became confused with the leadership's ambivalence about fighting the election or boycotting it (Tarique Rahman wanted to boycott). And so, the Awami League, buoyed with its government power, muscle strength and army loyalists, easily trounced the opposition. It swept the

elections, winning 288 out of 300 parliamentary seats.

The hope that truly democratic and secular forces would emerge to end the duel between the two family-led forces of Hasina-headed Awami league and Khaleda-headed BNP has thus been dashed. Kamal Hossain was the key figure who could have brought about that change. His BNP and Jamaat connection failed him, and the Awami League has stormed to power even stronger than before.

Question remains, whither Bangladesh? In a recent interview, Bangladesh's former Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha, a Hindu who now resides in the US, says that Sheikh Hasina used the judiciary to settle scores with Khaleda Zia. Sinha alleges that Hasina used military intelligence to harass him, finally forcing him to leave the country. He accuses Hasina of transforming Bangladesh into another Pakistan, saying that she is stifling free speech, giving unnecessary powers to the army and making it a police State.

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The Political Roots of Falling Wage Growth

Jayati Ghosh

It's now official: workers around the world are falling behind. The International Labour Organisation's (ILO) latest *Global Wage Report* finds that, excluding China, real (inflation-adjusted) wages grew at an annual rate of just 1.1% in 2017, down from 1.8% in 2016. That is the slowest pace since 2008.

In the advanced G20 economies, average real wages grew by a mere 0.4% in 2017, compared to 1.7% growth in 2015. While real wages were up by 0.7% in the United States (versus 2.2% in 2015), they stagnated in Europe, where small increases in some countries were offset by declines in France, Germany, Italy, and Spain. The slowdown in "success stories" like Germany and the US is particularly surprising, given the former's expanding current-account surpluses and the latter's falling unemployment and tight labour markets.

In emerging markets, average wage growth in 2017, at 4.3%, was faster than in the advanced G20 economies, but still slower than the previous year (4.9%). Asia enjoyed the fastest real wage growth, owing largely to China and a few smaller countries such as Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Myanmar. But, overall, wage growth in Asian economies mostly decelerated in 2017. And in Latin America and Africa, several countries experienced real-wage declines.

Moreover, the ILO report finds that the gap between wage growth and labour productivity remained wide in 2017. In many countries, labour's share of national income

is still below the levels of the early 1990s.

That raises an obvious question: Given the global output recovery of recent years, why have conditions for workers in most parts of the world not improved commensurately?

Neither of the usual suspects, trade and technology, is entirely to blame. To be sure, large labour-surplus economies' deepening integration into the global market, together with increased reliance on automation and artificial intelligence, has weakened workers' bargaining power and shifted labour demand into very specific and limited sectors. But these factors alone do not explain the lack of material progress for most workers.

The real reason workers are getting a raw deal is not so much economic as institutional and political. From country to country, legislation and court judgments are increasingly trampling on long-recognised labour rights.

For example, governments focused solely on improving "labour-market flexibility" have pursued policies that privilege employers' interests over those of workers, not least by undercutting workers' ability to organise. An obsession with fiscal consolidation and austerity has prevented the kind of social spending that could expand public employment and improve workers' conditions. And the current regulatory environment increasingly allows for large corporations to wield power without accountability, resulting in higher monopoly rents and greater bargaining power.

In short, neoliberalism's intellectual capture of economic policymaking across a wide range of countries, is resulting in the exclusion of most wage earners from the gains of economic growth. But this was not inevitable. China, after all, has achieved rapid wage growth, and the share of national income accruing to labour is rising, despite the country's pursuit of trade and rapid labour-displacing technologies.

China's success may vindicate a model advanced by the late Nobel laureate economist W. Arthur Lewis, which explains how employment in new, more productive sectors can absorb surplus labour and push up wages over all. But, more to the point, China has augmented this effect through systematic state policies designed to improve labour conditions.

As a result, the average nominal minimum wage in China nearly doubled between 2011 and 2018, and wages for workers in state-owned enterprises rose even faster. At the same time, the government has expanded other forms of social protections for workers, all while pursuing industrial policies geared toward boosting innovation and productivity growth, thus moving the country up the global value chain.

True, China's political economy is unusual. The government's concern for workers' wellbeing could simply reflect the Communist Party of China's need to secure its domestic political position. In that case, it has forged a Faustian social bargain that is typical of East Asian autocracies.

Still, if China can buck the trend

of declining wage growth, other countries can, too. First, though, economic policymakers around the world will have to shake off the neoliberal paradigm, which has left them incapable of imagining alternative policy approaches. As a political project, neoliberalism has run its course. If workers are going to partake in the gains of growth once again, governments will need to start adopting more progressive policy alternatives.

Fortunately, the ILO and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development have begun to put more sensible policies back on the agenda, as have some politicians in the US, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere. But ensuring that the economy serves the bulk of society will require a much bigger push across the board.

From the Missing Archives of a Lost War

Nick Turse

It was nearly sunset on Easter Saturday when I met Marie Dz'dza. She was sitting on a set of steps in a hospital compound in the town of Bunia. Near her was her mother, Jesinne Dhewedza, and her niece, six-year-old Irene Mave. Two weeks earlier, I might have noticed any number of things about them—Dz'dza's prominent cheekbones, Mave's smile, Dhewedza's graying hair. Instead, my attention was focused on what had been taken from them when men with machetes fell upon their village. Dhewedza now had six fingers instead of 10; Mave, one arm instead of two; and Dz'dza's arms ended just below the elbow.

They were victims of an outbreak of hyper-violence that had swept

through the Democratic Republic of Congo's Ituri Province in the first months of this year, part of a constellation of conflicts affecting a country long plagued by such violence. The three of them were also among the millions of victims of the wars of the last century that have disproportionately affected civilians.

The end of World War I, that war to end all wars a century ago, marked the passing of conflicts in which soldiers' deaths outnumbered those of civilians. Since then, noncombatants, people like Dz'dza, Dhewedza, and Mave, have borne the brunt of war. As it happens, this grim anniversary year coincides with one of my own. While I didn't realise it at the time, my recent

reporting on an ethnic-cleansing campaign in the Democratic Republic of Congo for Vice News marked roughly 12 years since I first began interviewing people who had lost parts of themselves to armed conflicts. Over that span, I've regularly witnessed the way war's barbarism is inscribed on the bodies of men, women, and children. I've seen civilian victims who have lost eyes and ears, hands and feet, arms and legs—people who are now a living testament to our inhumanity.

While I've spoken to many hundreds of war victims and chronicled atrocities from Afghanistan to Cameroon to South Sudan, interviews with people whom war has literally reshaped have

often stuck with me, though few more vividly than those in the 2008 TomDispatch piece reposted below. A decade ago, reporting from Vietnam for this website, I interviewed two men who had lost legs to the "American War" almost 40 years earlier. The generosity of readers led to a happy result: those two survivors received new prosthetics—hardly compensation for what they had lost, but perhaps the bare minimum we owe to the civilian casualties of our conflicts; the bare minimum, in fact, that the world owes all the victims, including Dz'dza, Dhewedza, and Mave, from conflicts that were supposed to have been over and done with a century ago, but which, sadly enough, churn on today, from Afghanistan and Syria to Yemen and Congo.

The article that follows flowed far more from the questions those survivors of war asked me than the ones I asked them. It also taught me something about another bare minimum we owe to the victims of our wars: listening to them. Sadly, since this piece was published in 2008, a decade's worth of new war victims have been added to the pages of humanity's most appalling ledger. Who will chronicle all of their stories? And even if someone did, would we have the courage to read them? Nick Turse

America's Forgotten Vietnamese Victims

Nguyen Van Tu asks if I'm serious. Am I really willing to tell his story—to tell the story of the Vietnamese who live in this rural corner of the Mekong Delta? Almost 40 years after guerrilla fighters in his country threw the limits of US military power into stark relief—

during the 1968 Tet Offensive—we sit in his rustic home, built of wood and thatch with an earthen floor, and speak of two hallmarks of that power: ignorance and lack of accountability. As awkward chicks scurry past my feet, I have the sickening feeling that, in decades to come, far too many Iraqis and Afghans will have similar stories to tell. Similar memories of American troops. Similar accounts of air strikes and artillery bombardments. Nightmare knowledge of what "America" means to far too many outside the United States.

"Do you really want to publicise this thing," Nguyen asks. "Do you really dare tell everyone about all the losses and sufferings of the Vietnamese people here?" I assure this well-weathered 60-year old grandfather that that's just why I've come to Vietnam for the third time in three years. I tell him I have every intention of reporting what he's told me—decades-old memories of daily artillery shelling, of near constant air attacks, of farming families forced to live in their fields because of the constant bombardment of their homes, of women and children killed by bombs, of going hungry because US troops and allied South Vietnamese forces confiscated their rice, lest it be used to feed guerrillas.

After hearing of the many horrors he endured, I hesitantly ask him about the greatest hardship he lived through during what's appropriately known here as the American War. I expect him to mention his brother, a simple farmer shot dead by America's South Vietnamese allies in the early years of the war, when the United States was engaged primarily in an "advisory" role. Or his father who was killed just after the war, while

tending his garden, when an M-79 round—a 40 mm shell fired from a single-shot grenade launcher—buried in the soil, exploded. Or that afternoon in 1971 when he heard outgoing artillery being fired and warned his family to scramble for their bunker by shouting, "Shelling, shelling!" They made it to safety. He didn't. The 105 mm artillery shell that landed near him ripped off most of his right leg.

But he didn't name any of these tragedies.

"During the war, the greatest difficulty was a lack of freedom," he tells me. "We had no freedom."

A Simple Request

Elsewhere in the Mekong Delta, Pham Van Chap, a solidly-built 52 year-old with jet black hair tells a similar story. His was a farming family, but the lands they worked and lived on were regularly blasted by US ordnance. "During the ten years of the war, there was serious bombing and shelling in this region—two to three times a day," he recalls while sitting in front of his home, a one-story house surrounded by animal pens in a bucolic setting deep in the Delta countryside. "So many houses and trees were destroyed. There were so many bomb craters around here."

In January 1973, the first month of the last year US troops fought in Vietnam, Pham heard the ubiquitous sound of artillery and started to run to safety. It was too late. A 105 mm shell slammed into the earth four meters in front of him, propelling razor-sharp shrapnel into both legs. When he awoke in the hospital, one leg was gone from the thigh down. After 40 days in the hospital, he was sent home, but he didn't

get his first prosthetic leg until the 1990s. His new replacement is now eight years old and a far cry from the advanced, computerised prosthetics and carbon fiber and titanium artificial legs that wounded US veterans of America's latest wars get. His wooden prosthetic instead resembles a table leg with a hoof at the bottom. "It has not been easy for me without my leg," he confides.

When I ask if there are any questions he'd like to ask me or anything he'd like to say to Americans, he has a quick response. He doesn't ask for money for his pain and suffering. Nor for compensation for living his adult life without a leg. Nor vengeance, that all-American urge, in the words of George W. Bush to "kick some ass." Not even an apology. His request is entirely too reasonable. He simply asks for a new leg. Nothing more.

Ignorance Means Never Having to Say You're Sorry

I ask Nguyen Van Tu the same thing. And it turns out he has a question of his own: "Americans caused many losses and much suffering for the Vietnamese during the war, do Americans now feel remorse?" I wish I could answer "yes." Instead, I tell him that most Americans are totally ignorant of the pain of the Vietnamese people, and then I think to myself, as I glance at the ample pile of tiny, local potatoes on his floor, about widespread American indifference to civilians killed, maimed, or suffering in other ways in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Even those Vietnamese who didn't lose a limb—or a loved one—carry memories of years of anguish, grief, and terror from the

American War. The fall-out here is still palpable. The elderly woman who tells me how her home was destroyed by an incendiary bomb. The people who speak of utter devastation—of villages laid waste by shelling and bombing, of gardens and orchards decimated by chemical defoliants. The older woman who, with trepidation, peeks into a home where I'm interviewing—she hasn't seen a Caucasian since the war—and is visibly unnerved by the memories I conjure up. Another begins trembling upon hearing that the Americans have arrived again, fearing she might be taken away, as her son was almost 40 years earlier. The people with memories of heavily armed American patrols disrupting their lives, searching their homes, killing their livestock. The people for whom English was only one phrase, the one they all seem to remember: "VC, VC"—slang for the pejorative term "Viet Cong"; and those who recall model names and official designations of US weaponry of the era—from bombs to rifles—as intimately as Americans today know their sports and celebrities.

I wish I could tell Nguyen Van Tu that most Americans know something of his country's torture and torment during the war. I wish I could tell him that most Americans care. I wish I could tell him that Americans feel true remorse for the terror visited upon the Vietnamese in their name, or that an apology is forthcoming and reparations on their way. But then I'd be lying. Mercifully, he doesn't quiz me as I've quizzed him for the better part of an hour. He doesn't ask how Americans can be so ignorant or hard-hearted, how they could allow their country to repeatedly invade

other nations and leave them littered with corpses and filled with shattered families, lives, and dreams. Instead he answers calmly and methodically:

"I have two things to say. First, there have been many consequences due to the war and even now the Vietnamese people suffer greatly because of it, so I think that the American government must do something in response—they caused all of these losses here in Vietnam, so they must take responsibility for that. Secondly, this interview should be an article in the press."

I sit there knowing that the chances of the former are nil. The US government won't do it and the American people don't know, let alone care, enough to make it happen. But for the latter, I tell him I share his sentiments and I'll do my best.

Nguyen Van Tu grasps my hands in thanks as we end the interview. His story is part of a hidden, if not forbidden, history that few in the US know. It's a story that was written in blood in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos during the 1960s and 1970s and now is being rewritten in Afghanistan and Iraq. It's a story to which new episodes are added each day that US forces roll armored vehicles down other people's streets, kick down other people's doors, carry out attacks in other people's neighbourhoods and occupy other people's countries.

It took nearly 40 years for word of Nguyen Van Tu's hardships at the hands of the United States to filter back to America. Perhaps a few more Americans will feel remorse as a result. But who will come forward to take responsibility for all this suffering? And who will give Pham Van Chap a new leg?

The ‘Green New Deal’ Just Might Work

Ellen Brown

With what author and activist Naomi Klein calls “galloping momentum,” the “Green New Deal” promoted by Rep.-elect Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., appears to be forging a political pathway for solving all of the ills of US society and the planet in one fell swoop. Her plan would give a select committee of the US House of Representatives “a mandate that connects the dots” between energy, transportation, housing, health care, living wages, a jobs guarantee and more. But even to critics on the left, it is merely political theater, because “everyone knows” a program of that scope cannot be funded without a massive redistribution of wealth and slashing of other programs (notably the military), which is not politically feasible.

That may be the case, but Ocasio-Cortez and the 22 representatives joining her in calling for a select committee also are proposing a novel way to fund the program, one that could actually work. The resolution says funding will come primarily from the federal government, “using a combination of the Federal Reserve, a new public bank or system of regional and specialised public banks, public venture funds and such other vehicles or structures that the select committee deems appropriate, in order to ensure that interest and other investment returns generated from public investments made in connection with the Plan will be returned to the treasury, reduce taxpayer burden and allow for more investment.”

A network of public banks

could fund the Green New Deal in the same way President Franklin Roosevelt funded the original New Deal. At a time when the banks were bankrupt, he used the publicly owned Reconstruction Finance Corp. as a public infrastructure bank. The Federal Reserve could also fund any program Congress wanted, if mandated to do so. Congress wrote the Federal Reserve Act and can amend it. Or the Treasury itself could do it, without the need to even change any laws. The Constitution authorises Congress to “coin money” and “regulate the value thereof,” and that power has been delegated to the Treasury. It could mint a few trillion-dollar platinum coins, put them in its bank account and start writing checks against them. What stops legislators from exercising those constitutional powers is simply that “everyone knows” Zimbabwe-style hyperinflation will result. But will it? Compelling historical precedent shows that this need not be the case.

Michael Hudson, professor of economics at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, has studied the hyperinflation question extensively. He writes that disasters such as Zimbabwe’s fiscal troubles were not due to the government printing money to stimulate the economy. Rather, “Every hyperinflation in history has been caused by foreign debt service collapsing the exchange rate. The problem almost always has resulted from wartime foreign currency strains, not domestic spending.”

As long as workers and materials are available and the money is added

in a way that reaches consumers, adding money will create the demand necessary to prompt producers to create more supply. Supply and demand will rise together and prices will remain stable. The reverse is also true. If demand (money) is not increased, supply and gross domestic product (GDP) will not go up. New demand needs to precede new supply.

The Precedent of Roosevelt’s New Deal

Infrastructure projects of the sort proposed in the Green New Deal are “self-funding,” generating resources and fees that can repay the loans. For these loans, advancing funds through a network of publicly owned banks would not require taxpayer money and could actually generate a profit for the government. That was how the original New Deal rebuilt the country in the 1930s at a time when the economy was desperately short of money.

The publicly owned Reconstruction Finance Corp. (RFC) was a remarkable publicly owned credit machine that allowed the government to finance the New Deal and World War II without turning to Congress or the taxpayers for appropriations. First instituted in 1932 by President Herbert Hoover, the RFC was not called an infrastructure bank and was not even a bank, but it served the same basic functions. It was continually enlarged and modified by Roosevelt to meet the crisis of the times, until it became America’s largest corporation and the world’s

largest financial organisation. Its semi-independent status let it work quickly, allowing New Deal agencies to be financed as the need arose.

The Reconstruction Finance Corp. Act of 1932 provided the financial organisation with capital stock of \$500 million and the authority to extend credit up to \$1.5 billion (subsequently increased several times). The initial capital came from a stock sale to the US Treasury. With those resources, from 1932 to 1957 the RFC loaned or invested more than \$40 billion. A small part of this came from its initial capitalisation. The rest was borrowed, chiefly from the government itself. Bonds were sold to the Treasury, some of which were then sold to the public, although most were held by the Treasury. All in all, the RFC ended up borrowing a total of \$51.3 billion from the Treasury and \$3.1 billion from the public.

In this arrangement, the Treasury was therefore the lender, not the borrower. As the self-funding loans were repaid, so were the bonds that were sold to the Treasury, leaving the RFC with a net profit. The financial organisation was the lender for thousands of infrastructure and small-business projects that revitalised the economy, and these loans produced a total net income of \$690,017,232 on the RFC's "normal" lending functions (omitting such things as extraordinary grants for wartime). The RFC financed roads, bridges, dams, post offices, universities, electrical power, mortgages, farms and much more, and it funded all this while generating income for the government.

How Japan Is Funding Abenomics with Quantitative Easing

The Federal Reserve is another Green New Deal funding option. The Fed showed what it can do with "quantitative easing" when it created the funds to buy \$2.46 trillion in federal debt and \$1.77 trillion in mortgage-backed securities, all without inflating consumer prices. The Fed could use the same tool to buy bonds earmarked for a Green New Deal, and because it returns its profits to the Treasury after deducting its costs, the bonds would be nearly interest-free. If they were rolled over from year to year, the government, in effect, would be issuing new money.

This is not just theory. Japan is actually doing it, without creating even the modest 2 percent inflation the government is aiming for. "Abenomics," the economic agenda of Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, combines central bank quantitative easing with fiscal stimulus (large-scale increases in government spending). Since Abe came into power in 2012, Japan has seen steady economic growth, and its unemployment rate has fallen by nearly half, yet inflation remains very low, at 0.7 percent. Social Security-related expenses accounted for 55 percent of general expenditure in Japan's 2018 federal budget, and a universal health care insurance system is maintained for all citizens. Nominal GDP is up 11 percent since the end of the first quarter of 2013, a much better record than during the prior two decades of Japanese stagnation, and the Nikkei stock market is at levels not seen since the early 1990s, driven by improved company earnings. Growth remains below targeted levels, but according to Financial Times, this is because fiscal stimulus has actually been too small. While spending with the

left hand, the government has been taking the money back with the right, increasing the sales tax from 5 percent to 8 percent.

Abenomics has been declared a success even by the once-critical International Monetary Fund. After Abe crushed his opponents in 2017, Noah Smith wrote in Bloomberg, "Japan's long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party has figured out a novel and interesting way to stay in power—govern pragmatically, focus on the economy and give people what they want." Smith said everyone who wanted a job had one, small and midsize businesses were doing well; and the Bank of Japan's unprecedented program of monetary easing had provided easy credit for corporate restructuring without generating inflation. Abe had also vowed to make both pre-school and college free.

Not that all is idyllic in Japan. Forty percent of Japanese workers lack secure full-time employment and adequate pensions. But the point underscored here is that large-scale digital money-printing by the central bank to buy back the government's debt, combined with fiscal stimulus by the government (spending on "what the people want"), has not inflated Japanese prices, the alleged concern preventing other countries from doing the same.

Abe's novel economic program has done more than just stimulate growth. By selling its debt to its own central bank, which returns the interest to the government, the Japanese government has, in effect, been canceling its debt. Until recently, it was doing this at the rate of a whopping \$720 billion per year. According to fund manager Eric Lonergan in a February 2017 article: "The Bank of Japan is in

the process of owning most of the outstanding government debt of Japan (it currently owns around 40%). BOJ holdings are part of the consolidated government balance sheet. So its holdings are in fact the accounting equivalent of a debt cancellation. If I buy back my own mortgage, I don't have a mortgage."

If the Federal Reserve followed suit and bought 40 percent of the US national debt, it would be holding \$8 trillion in federal securities, three times its current holdings from its quantitative easing programs. Yet liquidating a full 40 percent of Japan's government debt has not triggered price inflation.

Filling the Gap Between Wages, Debt and GDP

Rather than stepping up its bond-buying, the Federal Reserve is now bent on "quantitative tightening," raising interest rates and reducing the money supply by selling its bonds into the market in anticipation of "full employment" driving up prices. "Full employment" is considered to be 4.7 percent unemployment, taking into account the "natural rate of unemployment" of people between jobs or voluntarily out of work. But the economy has now hit that level and prices are not in the danger zone, despite nearly 10 years of "accommodative" monetary policy. In fact, the economy is not near true full employment nor full productive capacity, with GDP remaining well below both the long-run trend and the level predicted by forecasters a decade ago. In 2016, real per capita GDP was 10 percent below the 2006 forecast of the Congressional Budget Office, and it shows no signs of returning to the predicted level.

In 2017, US GDP was \$19.4

trillion. Assuming that sum is 10 percent below full productive capacity, the money circulating in the economy needs to be increased by another \$2 trillion to create the demand to bring it up to full capacity. That means \$2 trillion could be injected into the economy every year without creating price inflation. New supply would just be generated to meet the new demand, bringing GDP to full capacity while keeping prices stable.

This annual injection of new money can not only be done without

creating price inflation, it actually needs to be done to reverse the massive debt bubble now threatening to propel the economy into another Great Recession. Moreover, the money can be added in such a way that the net effect will not be to increase the money supply. Virtually the entire US money supply is created by banks as loans, and any money used to pay down those loans will be extinguished along with the debt. Other money will be extinguished when it returns to the government in the form of taxes.

Press Release: Socialist Party (India)

On 10% Reservation to Economically Weak Sections in General Category

Prem Singh

Mr. Kotha Prabhakar Reddy, Member Parliament, on 8 January 2019, sought a reply from Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, to the question (No. 4475) on 'Reservation for Poor'. Mr. Reddy's question was : (a) whether the Government is exploring the scope of providing reservation for poor candidates from forward communities for education and employment; (b) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons thereof; (c) whether the Government has received any demands from sections of forward communities like the Marathas in Maharashtra, Rajputs in Rajasthan and Thakurs in Uttar Pradesh to give reservation for economically weak members of their groups; and (d) if so, the details thereof and the action being taken by the Government in this regard?

The Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment Mr.

Krishan Pal Gujar replied : (a) and (b) : At present, no such proposal is under consideration. (c) and (d) : No such proposal has been received by the Government.

On January 7, 2019, the Constitution (124th Amendment) Bill 2019 on 10 percent reservation to the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) of the general category in education and employment was approved by the Central Cabinet. On January 8, the last day of the Winter Session, this 'historic' Amendment Bill was passed in the Lok Sabha and on January 9 in the Rajya Sabha by extending the Session by one day. And yet the Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment gave the above information in response to the question in Parliament at around 11 am on January 8!

In the view of the Socialist Party, these facts tell us that the Modi

government does not care about the parliamentary system, its dignity and its sanctity. The government did not put the Bill for debate in the arena of civil society nor did it send it to a Select Committee of the Parliament. Of course, the Government has declared this decision to be a 'master stroke' with the intention of winning the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. This 'master stroke' of the government reminds one of V.P. Singh's decision to implement the Mandal Commission's recommendations in one stroke. V.P. Singh applied that 'master stroke' with the goal of finishing off his mentor Devi Lal in the battle of political dominance. But the difference in both the decisions is that the Mandal Commission was constituted by the Parliament and the Mandal Commission's recommendations on reservation were in line with the basic structure of the Constitution and the concept of social justice as provided for in the Constitution. This decision of the present government is totally opposite to the basic structure of the Constitution and the constitutional concept of social justice, wherein reservation is given for socially backward communities who have suffered in the past.

The Socialist Party perceives this decision of the Modi Government as "historic" in the sense that now the political parties and the governments in India will not formulate their policies on the basis of the Directive Principles of the State (i.e. socialist system) as enshrined in the Constitution, that are aimed at building an egalitarian India by removing economic disparity and erasing caste discrimination. Rather they will continue to pursue the goal of making a 'New India' of the rich at the expense of the working classes

under corporate capitalism.

Almost all opposition parties have supported the Bill in both the Houses. The political leaders who have opposed it are guided by the electoral politics. They do not have a fundamental opposition to the government's intention of destroying the basic structure of the Constitution.

The authenticity of those who are opposing this decision outside political parties, would be based on the criterion whether they are decisively opposing corporate capitalism or not and whether they are willing to understand the truth that Brahmanism-Manuism have been completely transformed into capitalism.

The Socialist Party would further like to state that with this decision the BJP has firmly embedded caste (apart from religion) in the political

discourse of the country. It has therefore pushed the country into the pit of counter-revolution. Even after 70 years of Independence, there is no progress in the meaning of citizenship; rather it is progressively disappearing. In 'New India', the identity of a person will not be that of a citizen, but he/she will be recognised on the basis of religion and caste.

The Socialist Party opposes the Amendment Bill on two grounds: 1. This is contrary to the concept of reservation perceived by the makers of the Constitution; and 2. The government's decision is the protection shield for neo-liberal policies under which the commercialisation of education and elimination of employment is being done.

Email: drpremsingh8@gmail.com

Sangh's Latest Attacks on Academic Institutions

In his convocation address to the University of Allahabad in 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru said, "A university stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for the adventure of ideas and for the search of truth. It stands for the onward march of the human race towards even higher objectives. If the universities discharge their duties adequately, then it is well with the nation and the people". In 2018, are the universities with the nation and the people? Or should we ask, is the nation and the people with its universities?

On October 31, eminent historian and author Ramachandra Guha announced via twitter that he will not be joining Ahmedabad University in the coming year.

Just two days before that, Rajiv Malhotra, a US based author and prominent Hindutva ideologue, was appointed as an Honorary Visiting Professor in JNU. On November 2, Arnab Goswami was appointed a member of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML) Society in place of eminent political scientist Pratap Bhanu Mehta who had resigned from the Society earlier this year. All three events are being widely seen as a part of the on-going saffronisation of higher education and research institutions across the country.

Ramachandra Guha tweeted, "Due to circumstances beyond my control, I shall not be joining Ahmedabad University." The academic was offered an

appointment to join the university as the Shrenik Lalbhai Chair Professor of Humanities and director of the Gandhi Winter School at the School of Arts and Sciences. Since the university made the announcement public on October 16, it witnessed a wide range of protests staged by the Akhil Bharti Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the student's wing of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. The ABVP submitted a memorandum to the registrar of the university, B M Shah, objecting to the appointment of the historian on the grounds that he had "anti-national" views.

According to reports, after receiving threats from ABVP, the AU administration reached out to Guha on Monday to discuss the possibility of deferring the date of his joining. He was supposed to join AU on February 1, 2019. In another tweet, Guha expressed his disagreement with the decision and said, "A biographer of Gandhi cannot teach a course on Gandhi in Gandhi's own city."

Calling the historian a "communist" for his views, Pravin Desai, secretary of the Ahmedabad unit of the ABVP, said, "We want intellectuals in our educational institutes and not anti-nationals who can also be termed as 'urban Naxals'. If he is invited to Gujarat, there would be a JNU like anti-national sentiment."

Dhananjay Rai, an Assistant Professor at the political science department of the Central University of Gujarat said, "I think academic freedom is sacrosanct in a way. The binary between national and anti-national is not just precarious but also antithetical to creative imagination and the pursuance of higher education. I think there is a difference between dislike and

disagreement, one can agree or disagree, but to let this affect the enrichment of university is not a good thing as universities without academic freedom would account for the end of higher education. I think it would have been beneficial for Ahmedabad University had Ramachandra Guha been there and his presence would have been enriching both in terms of agreement and disagreement."

This is not the first time universities in Gujarat have seen violent protests from right-wing outfits. Last year, Maharaja Sayajirao University (MSU), Vadodara, had to cancel a day long workshop by Prof. Ghanshyam Shah titled "Reading the Margins: Politics of Caste and Social Movements in India", after Hindutva groups threatened to disrupt the workshop. In response to the fiasco over Ramachandra Guha's appointment, Shah said, "All academic institutions in Gujarat, including the private ones, are under pressure and that might be one of the reasons why Professor Ramachandra Guha withdrew. This is exactly what happened with me in MSU. The same pattern is continuing. I think this is how it is going to be, since there is no resistance in academic circles. This has been going on for more than six–seven years. There is nobody in the major universities to raise their voices. Everyone is silent. When I heard that Guha is joining Ahmedabad University, I thought that will be good for the students, but the administration backed-off at the last moment. There must have been pressure from above."

Over the past few years, we have seen how the education sector has been privatised in the hands of the right-wing groups. The Hinduisation of education, erasing history from

the textbooks in the name of religion and the continuous, almost planned attacks on academicians and free-thinkers clearly shows the right-wing's fear of liberal thought and freedom of expression.

Sahil Kureshi, a research scholar at Oxford University studying the saffronisation of campuses in Gujarat said, "This whole episode sheds light on what has been happening in universities in Gujarat for over two decades now. The Sangh has been in complete control of the universities and no voices of dissent, no matter how mild, are tolerated. And of course, what they mean by anti-national is anti-Sangh, they're not even trying to hide or disguise this anymore. All the excerpts provided as 'proof' are critical of the Sangh or the Hindu Rashtra. Also, the reaction of the university administration is, not in the least, surprising. It would be naive to expect anything else from the university administrations in these times, especially from private universities."

While in one university an eminent academic has been forced to relinquish his appointment, in another university a bigot and Hindutva apologist has been handed a plump post. The appointment of Rajiv Malhotra has caused much outrage. Historian S. Irfan Habib wrote in a tweet, "I don't think JNU deserved this insult. A pretender, a plagiarist and Hindutva proponent Rajiv Malhotra appointed honorary visiting professor at JNU." US based historian Audrey Truschke too condemned the move and tweeted, "A hate monger, plagiarist, without academic credentials, best known for his identity-fuelled attack on scholars has been appointed." Rajiv Malhotra, who has emerged as one of the most prominent ideologues

of the Hindu Right, has himself been known for vicious attacks and diatribes against free-thinkers and other voices of reason in India. Accused of plagiarism on multiple occasions, his appointment is being seen as nothing but an attempt by the ruling dispensation muscling its way into academic spaces.

Commenting upon Malholtra's appointment, Dhananjay Rai said, "Rajiv Malhotra is known for his extreme and non-academic interventions in academic sphere, and anyone who would talk about reason and rationality and humanity and universality and universalism would be antithetical to his cause. He speaks like a religious person in the attire of an academician and his various books and articles are based on binaries and the binary is very clear. I think this is a very

unfortunate development—in place of finding serious academic scholars in universities, people who are known for their illiberal and extreme views regarding various communities including minorities are being appointed."

Arnab Goswami's appointment, too, is a part of the same trend. Many senior journalists said that his appointment was not a good idea as it is a place for scholars and not for votaries of the ruling party.

All three incidents are a part of a new academic culture that is more concerned with appointing personnel politically or ideologically affiliated with the ruling regime, and using power to curb voices, rather than creating a socio-economic environment that encourages young and creative minds to think and critically engage. The problem with

the development of this "hinduised" academic culture is that dissent which questions the right-wing definition of nationalism is considered dangerous and is immediately labelled seditious or anti-national.

"On one side, anyone who is liberal would also be construed as a marxist or communist without understanding anything about marxism or communism, while on the other hand, any other space will be offered and provided to those who are not even engaged in serious discussions on history, economics, sociology or politics. They are only forming a common sense about history and sociology and political science. But this common sense has to be theorised as the knowledge," Rai concluded.

**Courtesy:
Indian Cultural Forum**

'Reservation Is Not Poverty Alleviation Programme'

P.S. Krishnan, the former secretary to government of India, was one of the crucial people behind the enactment of several historic laws regarding social justice. He spoke to the Wire on the Bill moved by the government to provide reservation to economically weaker upper castes in jobs and education. This interview was conducted before the Bill was passed by both houses of Parliament.

How do you react to the government's decision to give 10% quota in jobs to economically backward upper castes?

There are poor people among upper castes who need help. This should be appropriate and constitutionally sustainable. Our

constitution introduced reservation and other social justice measures for those who were excluded collectively from education and entry into services of the state and better opportunities because of the caste system. They inherited the caste system.

The writers of our Constitution deeply and poignantly considered the caste system and the harm it has done. They realised it had to be eliminated and those who suffered by it needed support to achieve equality.

These were the victims of untouchability i.e. scheduled castes and schedule tribes. They were socially and educationally backward classes. This was the basic structure. It was not a programme to eliminate

poverty. It was part of a national enterprise to remove the inequalities created by the caste system.

Now, there are poor people in all castes. They are poor Brahmins, poor Thakurs, poor Syeds and poor Baniyas who need help to complete their education. So, they need comprehensive scholarships, education loans, skill development assistance. They are economically backward, not socially. They require only economic support, not reservation.

So what about the government's current step?

This has not been done appropriately and may be questioned in the Supreme Court. The issue here is that whether it is in

accordance with the basic structure of the Constitution. It may be found violative of the basic structure and on that ground, struck down.

Several socially powerful castes such as Jats, Marathas and Patidars have been seeking reservation. How do you see this step in the light of this development?

They all have a high social status. Firstly, they can't be called backward classes. In the Bill, they are not being called backward classes. They are being called economically weaker sections. The Constitution does not provide for reservation for the economically weaker sections.

When the P.V. Narasimha Rao government tried to provide reservation to the economically weaker sections, the Supreme Court struck that down. How is it different this time?

Narasimha Rao's government only passed an executive order. Now, parliament is considering a Constitutional amendment. Therefore, the government hopes that it will withstand judicial scrutiny. But that scrutiny will still ask if this Bill or law is violative of the Constitution's basic structure or not.

So, I don't think making a Constitutional provision or including it in the ninth schedule will make it immune from judicial scrutiny. It will definitely follow.

But Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said in parliament that the 50% ceiling was for caste-based reservation. Here, the government is proposing reservation for the economically poor. Do you agree with that?

That isn't the main problem. The question is whether the Constitution's basic structure was violated or not. The Constitution has a special provision for victims of the caste system. The economically backward are not victims of the caste system.

New Era for Mexico's Zapatista Army

“We're the product of 500 years of struggles: first against slavery and the war for independence against Spain, then avoiding being absorbed by North American expansionism, then promulgating our Constitution and expelling the French Empire from our territory, then against Porfirio's dictatorship that denied the fair implementation of the Reform Laws . . .”

Those were the opening lines of the first public statement by the National Liberation Zapatista Army (EZLN), published on the day of the uprising on January 1, 1994, the day when the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into effect. The agreement binded the United States, Canada and Mexico into a single commercial zone, that has since impoverished the working classes while making the capitalist classes even richer.

In that first statement, the EZLN announced they would walk into Mexico City and defeat the national military, inviting people to rise up and join them in the fight. Since then, the Zapatistas have come an incredible distance, drawing various sectors of Mexican and international society, regardless of their background and skin color, into a struggle that continues till today.

Their stance is different now. Perhaps the invitation to rise up in arms was a “bluff” to intimidate the

You are creating a percentage of reservation for people who are not the victims of the caste system. What the Supreme Court will ultimately say, we will have to see.

Courtesy: **The Wire**

government, but we will never know. In the early years, they negotiated the San Andres Accords with the federal government that established that Indigenous peoples' autonomy would be respected. The agreements, however, were soon violated by the administration of Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de Leon, so the Zapatistas decided to implement them on their own, forever eschewing mainstream politics, including the new National Renewal Movement (Morena) led by Mexico's newly inaugurated President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador.

Support Networks

Claudia T., one of the founding members of a collective named 'Mujeres y la Sexta', was in Mexico City at the time of the uprising, 900 kilometers away from San Cristobal de las Casas. Sympathisers quickly organised protests to stop military action against the insurgents, and out of those connections were born new support networks in urban and rural areas. Some of those people formed brigades to bring aid to Chiapas, where the uprising took on new life. Luz y Fuerza del Centro, a state-owned electricity company with a combative union, even sent workers to install electricity in Zapatista villages where the government had been completely absent.

“There were several ways to help

them. People from the educational or nursing departments used to go and support them,” Claudia told teleSUR. “We would rent a bus and go as far as we could, then walk through wet mud to reach the communities, in order to help them. Everytime we went there, we brought back more than we took. They would give us their love, their teachings, their humanism.”

Those were some of the first relations established between the insurgent group (or communities) and civil society living in the cities and towns outside of the Zapatista rebel territory. In the subsequent years, collectives—a network of organisations and sympathisers—would establish long-standing relations with the Zapatistas. These collectives in turn influenced the Zapatistas too.

“Then the Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona came. They explained their six points and asked us: What is your opinion?” said Claudia.

“The relation that was initially established by going there and supporting the struggle was transformed. It was not any more a ‘come and help me,’ but a ‘let’s be partners in struggle’. The relationship has now changed. We now participate in their meetings, they invite us to forums, seminars. Scientists, artists, all of us participating in this process—we are all enriched by this participation. Simultaneously, their youth, the people in their communities, are enriched by our participation.”

This process took place in parallel with a transformation in the Zapatistas’ own internal political organisations. The ‘Aguascalientes’ were transformed into ‘Caracoles,’ each governed by

a ‘Good Governance Committee’. In this new political structure, the local or base communities are grouped into municipalities, which in turn are grouped into Caracoles. Each Caracole includes one or two delegates sent by each of the constituent municipalities. And each of the municipalities are run by committees to which each of the constituent base communities send their representatives.

According to the late Subcomandante Marcos, the movement’s most prominent spokesperson, the new political system created by the Zapatistas aimed to make the Caracole answerable to the local communities. The representatives sent by the local communities are not professional politicians. Instead, everyone is encouraged to participate and learn how to represent without substituting popular demand.

The focus of the Zapatistas has shifted since the time of the uprising. In 1996, they called for a meeting of Indigenous people from all across Mexico, which led to the formation of the National Indigenous Congress (CNI). The CNI is not just an organisation, it is rather a space to share information about community struggles, build their unity, and discuss vision of a possible future for the country. Indigenous people’s organisations from all over Mexico, who are not a part of the EZLN and who have not taken up arms, have joined the CNI and while continuing to organise resistance in their own areas, participate in CNI to share / build capacities and exchange worldviews.

The support networks played a key role in perhaps the CNI’s most widely known project, the formation of the Indigenous Government

Council (CIG) and election of Maria de Jesus Patricio Martinez, better known as ‘Marichuy,’ as their spokesperson and presidential candidate for the 2018 elections. They were in charge of organising Marichuy’s visits to their respective communities and cities, collecting signatures to approve her candidacy and include her in the ballots, and contributing to a collective reflection exercise on revolutionary praxis.

Charting Ever New Paths

The Zapatistas’ slow but steady development in revolutionary theory and practice has made them one of the main reference points for an alternative to capitalism in Latin America and the world. By refusing to take part in the mainstream economic and political system and actually proposing and executing alternative ideas, the movement is moving forward positively.

The Zapatistas believe that every individual and group should find their own path for liberation. “In 1994, the Zapatistas called for an uprising, and have since turned to other forms of struggle,” says Gogol, a writer and activist living in Mexico. “They are anti-vanguardist, and thus believe that each movement and social struggle needs to decide how it will organise and what form its struggle will take, without being dictated from above.”

This thinking has influenced Gogol and pushed him to write and organise study circles with colleagues to analyse today’s reality, while taking part in Zapatista-led initiatives and supporting the CNI and the CIG and its spokeswoman, Marichuy.

Now, the EZLN and other revolutionary Indigenous organisations are at a turning point.

Marichuy didn't make it to the ballots for the 2018 elections, won by the center-left Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO), but the CIG continues organising a national movement in which Campesinos and the working-class—both Indigenous and non-Indigenous—are integrated, to topple capitalism and the ruling class.

Lopez Obrador and his team have promised to respect the San Andres Accords signed by the EZLN and the government in the 1990s,

but reality seems different. Even though the accords establish that Indigenous communities should be consulted over anything related to their territory, one of Lopez Obrador's first announced projects, the Maya Train, has been approved without proper consultation, and Indigenous organisations from the Yucatan peninsula are rejecting it.

In late December, support networks from across Mexico, along with representatives of the CNI, the CIG and the EZLN, met

in Guadalupe Tepeyac, part of the Zapatista autonomous territory in Chiapas, to discuss the next steps in the struggle. On January 1, they will be at 'La Realidad,' the first Caracole, to commemorate 25 years of the uprising.

Taking into account the outcome of the last assembly, this has the potential to produce an inclusive national plan, a new step in the long road to autonomy, liberty, life and dignity.

Courtesy: Telesur

Footprints of A Crusader (The Life Story of Mrunal Gore)

by

Rohini Gawankar

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Kamalakar Subhedar

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Associate Editor : Neeraj Jain

Managing Editor : Guddi

Editorial Board : B. Vivekanandan, Qurban Ali, Anil Nauriya,
Sonal Shah, Amarendra Dhaneshwar, Sandeep Pandey

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

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Editorial

The Challenge of Fascism

G.G. Parikh and Neeraj Jain

With the gradual coming together of the opposition, hope has been generated across the country in recent days that the BJP can be defeated. This hope was first generated in a big way when the BJP was soundly defeated in the bypolls held across ten states in the country in mid-2018. Among the biggest defeats suffered by the BJP were its losses in Gorakhpur and Kairana parliamentary constituencies, both of which it had won in 2014 by huge margins. The Gorakhpur seat was in fact considered as one of the safest seats for the BJP in UP. This hope got a boost when the Congress–JDS came together to form the government in Karnataka, and then further when the Congress defeated the BJP in the assembly elections held in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh towards the end of 2018.

Of course, this unity is still fragile. The opposition nearly lost the plot in the Karnataka, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh assembly elections. In Karnataka, the JDS and Congress failed to form an alliance, resulting in a three-way election in which the BJP emerged as the single largest party (104 seats, 9 short of majority mark of 113; Congress got 80 seats, and JDS 37). It was only because the Congress did a quick climbdown and offered the chief ministership to the JDS that the two parties were able to come together and form the government. Had the two parties jointly fought the elections, an analysis of the election results shows that they would have easily won at least 30 more seats. Similarly, in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, where the BSP and Congress failed to fight the elections unitedly, the vote share of the Congress was only marginally more than the BJP in both the states. In Madhya Pradesh, the Congress actually failed to win a clear majority (winning 114 out of 230 assembly seats), and was able to form the government only because the BSP and SP announced

their support for it. Had the Congress and BSP come together in the MP state elections, analysts say that the combine would have won more than 140 seats.

Likewise, in the crucial state of UP, while the SP–BSP have come together in a very hope-generating development, they are attempting to keep the Congress out of the alliance, which may result in a big split in the opposition votes.

On January 19, leaders of 18 opposition parties shared the stage in the grand rally organised by Mamata Banerjee in Kolkata on January 19 before a crowd of roughly half-a-million people, and resolved to put up united fight against the BJP and oust it from power in the upcoming general elections. If indeed the opposition can get its act together and unitedly fight the BJP in the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections, there is a good possibility that it may defeat the latter and form the government at the Centre. Of course, the coming together of the opposition and fighting the BJP one-on-one is a big IF, as the above discussion shows.

However, even if the opposition does indeed manage to form the government at the Centre, even assuming that the government remains a stable government unlike the drama going on in Karnataka, the important question is whether it can indeed fight the challenge posed by the BJP. That is because firstly, the challenge—indeed, the threat—posed by BJP is no ordinary challenge, but is the danger of fascism; and secondly, the economic agenda of the opposition, as proven by the policies implemented by it wherever it has been in power, both at the Centre (like the UPA government of 2004–14) and in the states, has not been fundamentally different from the policies of the Modi Government of 2014–19.

The Danger of Fascism

Before we discuss the BJP and fascism, let us first discuss what is meant by fascism.

Fascism is a type of political movement that first originated in Europe in the early decades of the 20th century. It stormed to power in several countries of Europe during the interwar period of 1930–45 when the big corporations of those countries backed and liberally financed it, as they thought that the fascists in power would best serve their interests instead of the democratic system.

The diversities of the different European countries implied that there were different types of fascisms. Thus: i) One type of fascism was represented by Nazism in Germany—where the capitalist classes supported the rise of Hitler’s fascism to power to achieve their failed hegemonic aspirations of establishing domination over at least a part of the world; ii) Another type of fascism came in Italy under Mussolini—where the capitalist classes had no hegemonic aspirations to dominate Europe, their sole aim in supporting the rise of Mussolini being to counter the growing power of the left and socialist movements in Italy; iii) A third type of fascism was that of the Vichy Government under Philippe Pétain in France following the defeat of France at the hands of Germany in the Second World War, while Hungary’s Miklós Horthy and Romania’s Ion Antonescu represented still yet another type of fascism in the less developed capitalist countries of Eastern Europe.

Despite their differences, all these fascist regimes had certain common characteristic features. These can be called the fundamental characteristics of all fascist regimes:

- 1) Fascism bases itself on the categorical rejection of “democracy”. It seeks to replace the general principles on which democracy is based—recognition and respect for diversity of opinions, respect for electoral procedures to determine majority opinion / views, guarantee for the rights of minority—by majority authoritarianism. It seeks to impose the will of the majority on the minority by force and promotes violence by the majority without ethical or legal constraints.
- 2) This is almost always accompanied by a return to backward values and backward-looking ideas, such as a return to some ‘golden past’, or submission to some supposed characteristic of the ‘race’ or the ‘nation’. This provides a kind of legitimacy for assault on democracy.
- 3) Fascists often seek to mobilise the masses, that is, the majority of the people, in the name of extreme nationalism:
 - certain communities or groups are targeted as being a threat to the country, and nationalistic fervour is then used to mobilise the majority to attack and isolate them;
 - using this artificially created obsession

with national security, opponents and critics are labelled as anti-national and traitors.

BJP and Fascism in India

Let us now take a look at the growth of fascism in India.

The BJP stormed to power in the 2014 elections. In the subsequent five years, while it has proposed several significant changes in the constitution, it has not rejected constitutional, liberal democracy, it claims to uphold the institutions of liberal democracy such as the constitution, judiciary and a free media, and swears by universal franchise, multi-party elections and rule of the law.

But the difference between the BJP and the other right wing parties in the world, like the US Republicans or the British Tories, is that it is not an independent political party at all, but is only the mass political front of a seasoned and semi-secret organisation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh or the RSS.

While the RSS calls itself a 'cultural' and 'non-political' organisation, its declared intention is to subvert India's democracy and secular structure and transform India culturally, politically and socially into a *Hindu Rashtra*. According to the Anthropological Society of India, Indian population comprises of more than 4,000 distinct communities, marked by differences in customs, language, caste, religious beliefs, cuisine, location, and what have you. The RSS believes that despite these diversities, 80% of the Indian people are Hindus, and if indeed they can be united thus, then this demographic majority can be converted into a political majority. Furthermore, this hold over political power can become permanent, if those whom the RSS calls 'Hindus' willingly accept its ideology, and accordingly culturally transform themselves—an uncannily Gramscian principle. It can then easily go about transforming the country into a *Hindu Rashtra*, without formally repudiating liberal constitutionality.

And so, ever since its founding ninety years ago in 1925, the RSS has displayed a remarkable degree of patience in gradually spreading its ideology among the 'Hindus'. For this, the RSS has created a network of thousands of front organisations—together called the Sangh Parivar—to cater to the

innumerable diversities among the 'Hindus', with the aim of creating a cultural homogeneity out of this ocean of diversities, and thereby 'Hinduising' them. This is the essence of *Hindutva*, the political ideology of the RSS—welding the overwhelming majority of the Indian people together as 'Hindus', so that they can be mobilised towards transforming secular and democratic India into a *Hindu Rashtra*.

The religio-cultural definition of 'Hindus' by the RSS is very similar to the definition of the German Aryan race by the Nazis. And like Hitler sought to unite the Germans by spewing hatred against the Jews, depriving them of their civic and political rights, and persecuting them, the RSS is seeking to unite the Hindus by spewing hatred against the minorities, especially the Muslims and Christians, and orchestrating attacks on them under all kinds of guises.

Simultaneously, the BJP, together with the other front organisations of the RSS, has launched a brutal offensive to silence all opposition, labelling all opponents of the regime as anti-nationals, hounding them through sections of the media who have abandoned all media ethics to become stooges of the ruling party, getting a docile police force to arrest them under false charges of sedition . . . tactics that again are uncannily similar to those used by the Nazis.

The BJP and Corporate Power

Modi during his chief ministership of Gujarat for more than a decade and a half had a very successful record of favouring corporate houses, allowing them to rake in enormous profits. And so, as the 2014 Lok Sabha elections approached, the country's leading corporate honchos came together to strongly and openly promote Narendra Modi for the post of prime minister of the country, something that had never before taken place in the country. This transformed his image from that of being the man responsible for the pogrom-like ethnic cleansing of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002, to that of an economic genius who had single-handedly led the state of Gujarat from rags to riches, a veritable Development Man (*Vikaas Purush*) whose firm and visionary leadership was much needed by India in its quest to become an economic superpower.

India's big business houses poured so much

money into Modi's election campaign that it is estimated that he spent roughly the same amount as that spent by Obama in the 2012 Presidential elections in the USA. It was an unprecedented election campaign, what with 3D holographic rallies, extensive use of the social media as never before, and a mesmerising media campaign.

Predictably, the BJP swept the elections. Since then, the Modi-led BJP Government has blatantly run the economy for the profit maximisation of the corporate houses. So much so that it has even transferred lakhs of crores of rupees of public funds into their coffers, in the name of corporate tax concessions, corporate loan waivers, transferring the country's mineral wealth to them at very low royalty rates, giving them huge subsidies in their investments in the country's infrastructural sector in the name of public-private-partnership, selling off the country's public sector corporations to them at throwaway prices, and so on. It is because of these huge transfers of public money that the number of billionaires in India has more than doubled during the first four years of the Modi Government, going up from 56 in 2014 to 121 in 2018. In 2018, the wealth of India's richie rich increased by a whopping 39%, because of which the richest 1% in the country today hold more than half the country's wealth, and the richest 10% own 77.4%.

The flip side of these policies is that it has led to appalling levels of unemployment, a huge worsening of the crisis gripping the agricultural sector on which more than half the population depends for its livelihoods, and massive increase in poverty and destitution. As if this was not enough, the Modi Government has also made huge cuts in the government's already low social sector expenditures, further worsening the conditions of the people.

This has led to a groundswell of discontentment among the students and youth, the farmers and the working people. This caused the BJP to suffer a loss of about 17% in its voteshare in the 2018 Assembly elections in Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan as compared to the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, while in Madhya Pradesh it declined by about 13%—propelling the Congress to power in all these states. It is this swing in the mood of the people that is creating the conditions for a possible defeat of the BJP in the

coming Lok Sabha elections, if the opposition is able to unite.

Will the Opposition be Able to Fight Fascism?

Even assuming that the opposition is able to unite and defeat the BJP in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, and even assuming that it is able to overcome its internal divisions and provide a stable government for the next five years (let us, for brevity, call it the anti-BJP coalition government), the fascist threat facing the country is going to decrease only marginally.

The first reason is that the RSS has been seeking to capture the liberal institutions of the country, including the judiciary, the police, the educational, scientific and cultural institutions, and the media, from within, by staffing them with its personnel. This process began with great speed during the prime ministership of A.B. Vajpayee, and has considerably accelerated under the Modi regime. Desaffronising these institutions is going to be a massive task, and how much will the anti-BJP coalition government be willing to carry it out is open to conjecture. That is because the Hindutva ideology has succeeded in spreading its roots so deep in Indian society that none of the major anti-BJP parties (apart from the communists to some extent) are willing to counter it head-on, because of the fear of losing votes. Thus, for instance, way back in 1993–94, a textbook evaluation committee set up by the NCERT had stated that many of the textbooks prescribed in the thousands of schools run by the RSS (more on this below) through its front organisation, the Vidya Bharati, were “designed to promote bigotry and religious fanaticism in the name of inculcating knowledge of culture in the young generation.” Despite this damning diagnosis, the Congress-led UPA Government during its ten years in power from 2004–14 made no attempt to ban these textbooks.

The second reason is even more important and crucial, and that is, will the anti-BJP coalition be willing to implement genuinely pro-people policies, in contrast to the pro-corporate policies of the Modi-led BJP Government? This question arises, because while the anti-BJP coalition has been criticising the BJP for its anti-people policies, these policies

of the Modi Government are essentially only a continuation of the policies of the previous UPA Government. These are the policies of globalisation, privatisation and liberalisation. The only difference is that the Modi Government has implemented them at a much faster pace. These policies, also known as neoliberal policies, were in fact first introduced in the country by the Narsimha Rao–Manmohan Singh led Congress Government after it won the 1991 Lok Sabha elections, and have been implemented by every successive government that has come to power at the Centre since then.

If the anti-BJP coalition continues with the economic policies of the BJP, then it will only lead to yet more immiseration of the people, and will only create the conditions for the BJP to come back to power in the next Lok Sabha elections of 2014. With the RSS having further increased its strength by then, the BJP–RSS will be in a far more stronger position to impose fascism on the country than today.

What Next?

The only solution to this is that the genuinely socialist organisations—intellectuals and the non-sectarian left must mount pressure on the anti-BJP alliance to implement pro-people policies if the latter is able to come to power in the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. And the present political conditions in the country provide them the opportunity to do so.

Times of crisis also generate new rays of hope. BJP–RSS's fascist onslaught has so badly crushed the opposition parties that despite the huge egos and vested interests of their leaders, they have been forced to come together to unitedly fight it. They are also reaching out to progressive and socialist individuals and small groups / parties and are attempting to bring them together in the anti-BJP platform.

The fascist threat is the biggest crisis facing the country. *And the alternative to fascism is democracy, not socialism.* That comes later, once democracy is saved. Therefore, the more radical socialist intellectuals and groups, the genuinely anti-neoliberal socialists, even the genuinely anti-capitalist socialists, even though they may have reservations about aligning with the Congress or the socialism of the Samajwadi Party led by Akhilesh Yadav and the Rashtriya Janata Dal led

by Lalu Prasad Yadav, should support / join the anti-BJP opposition alliance. Though they are presently weak, their organisations are weak, their support to the opposition alliance will bring them to a position where they can influence the anti-BJP coalition to implement progressive policies—such as increasing taxes on the rich, stopping the loan waivers being given to the corporate houses and forcing them to repay their loans, taking steps to curb the profiteering of the corporate houses that would bring down electricity and gas prices (to give just one example), increasing government spending on the social sectors (especially education, health and nutrition), taking steps to mitigate the crisis gripping agriculture, implementing policies that would create decent jobs, etc.

Countering the RSS Network

There is another, actually more important reason, why the fascist threat will only have marginally decreased if the anti-BJP opposition alliance comes to power. And that is: it will only be the BJP that would have lost the elections, it will not affect the grassroots network and strength of the RSS. Therefore, the RSS will continue with its campaign of indoctrinating the people in its Hindutva ideology. The RSS has by now become a most formidable force. It has created hundreds, possibly even thousands, of front organisations, to together constitute what is easily the largest political force in the world of liberal democracies. These include some of the biggest mass organisations in the country. Thus, its workers' organisation, the Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh, claims a membership of over ten million workers and affiliation of over four thousand trade unions. Its student organisation, the Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad, is the largest student organisation in the country. Another important front organisation is the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, which in the late 1980s spearheaded the rolling out of violence and rabid ideological hysteria across the country that brought the BJP to power in Delhi for the first time for 13 days in 1996 and then for six years from 1998 to 2004, this time at the head of a coalition government. Apart from these mass organisations, even more dangerous is the huge network of schools created by the RSS across the country, coordinated at the all-India level by Vidya

Bharati. In the guise of education, these schools indoctrinate the young minds of children with the RSS ideology. It is the largest network of private schools in the country. Way back in 2012–13, that is, before Modi's rise to power, Vidya Bharati's network included 13,465 schools, 31.2 lakh students, 1.3 lakh teachers, 49 colleges and training schools, and 9,806 schools for providing informal education to children unable to attend formal schools (called Sanskar Kendras and Single Teacher Schools) with 2.4 lakh students and 8,900 teachers. This network must have expanded considerably since then.

The anti-BJP alliance just does not have the wherewithal to counter this octopussian network of the RSS. These parties and their mass organisations simply do not have the dedicated cadre required for this.

Again, this task can only be undertaken by the progressive / socialist / non-sectarian left organisations. While supporting the anti-BJP alliance, they will need to take advantage of a friendly government being in power to spread / strengthen their grassroots network and spread the values of the Constitution—equality, secularism, democracy, fraternity—among the people. This will include culturally winning over to these democratic values the crores of people who today have become blind followers of the fascist Hindutva ideology.

Towards Socialism

This will also create the conditions for the genuinely socialist organisations to advance the country towards socialism.

One of the biggest misunderstandings present among many believers of socialism today is the belief that if they are able to somehow come to power, they can take the country towards socialism by implementing pro-people policies. This is one of the most important reasons for the failures of the socialist movements during the twentieth century. Socialism is not statism or populism—wherein all the decisions are taken top-down, and the people look to the State to provide them with resources and with the answers to all their problems. Socialism is a new society that puts humans and not machines or the State at the centre of society, where apart from providing people with food, goods and services,

it also creates new, socialist, human beings. This creation of new socialist human beings does not take place automatically, but takes place only through a conscious process wherein people in the process of transforming society also change themselves.

By 'new human beings', we mean not just people who believe in genuine equality of all human beings (that is, people who genuinely do not believe in caste, who believe in gender equality, who believe in equality of all people, who have genuine respect for all religions); we mean not just people who believe in cooperation and who believe that production should take place not for profit maximisation of a few but should be oriented for fulfillment of social needs; we also mean: human beings with fully developed capacities. And people only develop their capacities when they themselves take an active part in decision making at all levels that affect them, be it their workplaces, or neighbourhoods / communities, or the society as a whole.

The fight against fascism, the fight to build an anti-BJP platform of all opposition parties and groups, provides the socialist organisations and groups with a great opportunity of developing such a network of socialist activists at the grassroots level. And assuming that the anti-BJP coalition is able to win power in the 2019 elections, the struggle to push this alliance to implement pro-people policies will provide a further opportunity to further strengthen this grassroots network, and further advance the capabilities and capacities of these grassroots activists.

These are indeed difficult times. But they also provide us, the socialists, with an unprecedented opportunity to advance our struggle for socialism . . .

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Why Socialism?

Albert Einstein

Is it advisable for one who is not an expert on economic and social issues to express views on the subject of socialism? I believe for a number of reasons that it is.

Let us first consider the question from the point of view of scientific knowledge. It might appear that there are no essential methodological differences between astronomy and economics: scientists in both fields attempt to discover laws of general acceptability for a circumscribed group of phenomena in order to make the interconnection of these phenomena as clearly understandable as possible. But in reality such methodological differences do exist. The discovery of general laws in the field of economics is made difficult by the circumstance that observed economic phenomena are often affected by many factors which are very hard to evaluate separately. In addition, the experience which has accumulated since the beginning of the so-called civilised period of human history has—as is well known—been largely influenced and limited by causes which are by no means exclusively economic in nature. For example, most of the major states of history owed their existence to conquest. The conquering peoples established themselves, legally and economically, as the privileged class of the conquered country. They seized for themselves a monopoly of the land ownership and appointed a priesthood from among their own ranks. The priests, in control of education, made the class division of society into a permanent institution and created a system of values by which the people were thenceforth, to a large extent unconsciously, guided in their social behavior.

But historic tradition is, so to speak, of yesterday; nowhere have we really overcome what Thorstein Veblen called “the predatory phase” of human development. The observable economic facts belong to that phase and even such laws as we can derive from them are not applicable to other phases. Since the real purpose of socialism is precisely to overcome and advance beyond the predatory phase

of human development, economic science in its present state can throw little light on the socialist society of the future.

Second, socialism is directed towards a social-ethical end. Science, however, cannot create ends and, even less, instill them in human beings; science, at most, can supply the means by which to attain certain ends. But the ends themselves are conceived by personalities with lofty ethical ideals and—if these ends are not stillborn, but vital and vigorous—are adopted and carried forward by those many human beings who, half unconsciously, determine the slow evolution of society.

For these reasons, we should be on our guard not to overestimate science and scientific methods when it is a question of human problems; and we should not assume that experts are the only ones who have a right to express themselves on questions affecting the organisation of society.

Innumerable voices have been asserting for some time now that human society is passing through a crisis, that its stability has been gravely shattered. It is characteristic of such a situation that individuals feel indifferent or even hostile toward the group, small or large, to which they belong. In order to illustrate my meaning, let me record here a personal experience. I recently discussed with an intelligent and well-disposed man the threat of another war, which in my opinion would seriously endanger the existence of mankind, and I remarked that only a supra-national organisation would offer protection from that danger. Thereupon my visitor, very calmly and coolly, said to me: “Why are you so deeply opposed to the disappearance of the human race?”

I am sure that as little as a century ago no one would have so lightly made a statement of this kind. It is the statement of a man who has striven in vain to attain an equilibrium within himself and has more or less lost hope of succeeding. It is the expression of a painful solitude and isolation from which so many people are suffering in these days. What is the cause? Is there a way out?

It is easy to raise such questions, but difficult to answer them with any degree of assurance. I must try, however, as best I can, although I am very conscious of the fact that our feelings and strivings are often contradictory and obscure and that they cannot be expressed in easy and simple formulas.

Man is, at one and the same time, a solitary being and a social being. As a solitary being, he attempts to protect his own existence and that of those who are closest to him, to satisfy his personal desires, and to develop his innate abilities. As a social being, he seeks to gain the recognition and affection of his fellow human beings, to share in their pleasures, to comfort them in their sorrows, and to improve their conditions of life. Only the existence of these varied, frequently conflicting, strivings accounts for the special character of a man, and their specific combination determines the extent to which an individual can achieve an inner equilibrium and can contribute to the well-being of society. It is quite possible that the relative strength of these two drives is, in the main, fixed by inheritance. But the personality that finally emerges is largely formed by the environment in which a man happens to find himself during his development, by the structure of the society in which he grows up, by the tradition of that society, and by its appraisal of particular types of behavior. The abstract concept "society" means to the individual human being the sum total of his direct and indirect relations to his contemporaries and to all the people of earlier generations. The individual is able to think, feel, strive, and work by himself; but he depends so much upon society—in his physical, intellectual, and emotional existence—that it is impossible to think of him, or to understand him, outside the framework of society. It is "society" which provides man with food, clothing, a home, the tools of work, language, the forms of thought, and most of the content of thought; his life is made possible through the labor and the accomplishments of the many millions past and present who are all hidden behind the small word "society."

It is evident, therefore, that the dependence of the individual upon society is a fact of nature which cannot be abolished—just as in the case of ants and bees. However, while the whole life process of ants and bees is fixed down to the smallest detail by rigid, hereditary instincts, the social pattern

and interrelationships of human beings are very variable and susceptible to change. Memory, the capacity to make new combinations, the gift of oral communication have made possible developments among human beings which are not dictated by biological necessities. Such developments manifest themselves in traditions, institutions, and organisations; in literature; in scientific and engineering accomplishments; in works of art. This explains how it happens that, in a certain sense, man can influence his life through his own conduct, and that in this process conscious thinking and wanting can play a part.

Man acquires at birth, through heredity, a biological constitution which we must consider fixed and unalterable, including the natural urges which are characteristic of the human species. In addition, during his lifetime, he acquires a cultural constitution which he adopts from society through communication and through many other types of influences. It is this cultural constitution which, with the passage of time, is subject to change and which determines to a very large extent the relationship between the individual and society. Modern anthropology has taught us, through comparative investigation of so-called primitive cultures, that the social behavior of human beings may differ greatly, depending upon prevailing cultural patterns and the types of organisation which predominate in society. It is on this that those who are striving to improve the lot of man may ground their hopes: human beings are not condemned, because of their biological constitution, to annihilate each other or to be at the mercy of a cruel, self-inflicted fate.

If we ask ourselves how the structure of society and the cultural attitude of man should be changed in order to make human life as satisfying as possible, we should constantly be conscious of the fact that there are certain conditions which we are unable to modify. As mentioned before, the biological nature of man is, for all practical purposes, not subject to change. Furthermore, technological and demographic developments of the last few centuries have created conditions which are here to stay. In relatively densely settled populations with the goods which are indispensable to their continued existence, an extreme division of labor and a highly-centralised productive apparatus are absolutely necessary. The

time—which, looking back, seems so idyllic—is gone forever when individuals or relatively small groups could be completely self-sufficient. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that mankind constitutes even now a planetary community of production and consumption.

I have now reached the point where I may indicate briefly what to me constitutes the essence of the crisis of our time. It concerns the relationship of the individual to society. The individual has become more conscious than ever of his dependence upon society. But he does not experience this dependence as a positive asset, as an organic tie, as a protective force, but rather as a threat to his natural rights, or even to his economic existence. Moreover, his position in society is such that the egotistical drives of his make-up are constantly being accentuated, while his social drives, which are by nature weaker, progressively deteriorate. All human beings, whatever their position in society, are suffering from this process of deterioration. Unknowingly prisoners of their own egotism, they feel insecure, lonely, and deprived of the naive, simple, and unsophisticated enjoyment of life. Man can find meaning in life, short and perilous as it is, only through devoting himself to society.

The economic anarchy of capitalist society as it exists today is, in my opinion, the real source of the evil. We see before us a huge community of producers the members of which are unceasingly striving to deprive each other of the fruits of their collective labor—not by force, but on the whole in faithful compliance with legally established rules. In this respect, it is important to realise that the means of production—that is to say, the entire productive capacity that is needed for producing consumer goods as well as additional capital goods—may legally be, and for the most part are, the private property of individuals.

For the sake of simplicity, in the discussion that follows I shall call “workers” all those who do not share in the ownership of the means of production—although this does not quite correspond to the customary use of the term. The owner of the means of production is in a position to purchase the labor power of the worker. By using the means of production, the worker produces new goods which become the property of the capitalist. The essential

point about this process is the relation between what the worker produces and what he is paid, both measured in terms of real value. Insofar as the labor contract is “free,” what the worker receives is determined not by the real value of the goods he produces, but by his minimum needs and by the capitalists’ requirements for labor power in relation to the number of workers competing for jobs. It is important to understand that even in theory the payment of the worker is not determined by the value of his product.

Private capital tends to become concentrated in few hands, partly because of competition among the capitalists, and partly because technological development and the increasing division of labor encourage the formation of larger units of production at the expense of smaller ones. The result of these developments is an oligarchy of private capital the enormous power of which cannot be effectively checked even by a democratically organised political society. This is true since the members of legislative bodies are selected by political parties, largely financed or otherwise influenced by private capitalists who, for all practical purposes, separate the electorate from the legislature. The consequence is that the representatives of the people do not in fact sufficiently protect the interests of the underprivileged sections of the population. Moreover, under existing conditions, private capitalists inevitably control, directly or indirectly, the main sources of information (press, radio, education). It is thus extremely difficult, and indeed in most cases quite impossible, for the individual citizen to come to objective conclusions and to make intelligent use of his political rights.

The situation prevailing in an economy based on the private ownership of capital is thus characterised by two main principles: first, means of production (capital) are privately owned and the owners dispose of them as they see fit; second, the labor contract is free. Of course, there is no such thing as a pure capitalist society in this sense. In particular, it should be noted that the workers, through long and bitter political struggles, have succeeded in securing a somewhat improved form of the “free labor contract” for certain categories of workers. But taken as a whole, the present day economy does not differ much from “pure” capitalism.

Production is carried on for profit, not for use. There is no provision that all those able and willing to work will always be in a position to find employment; an “army of unemployed” almost always exists. The worker is constantly in fear of losing his job. Since unemployed and poorly paid workers do not provide a profitable market, the production of consumers’ goods is restricted, and great hardship is the consequence. Technological progress frequently results in more unemployment rather than in an easing of the burden of work for all. The profit motive, in conjunction with competition among capitalists, is responsible for an instability in the accumulation and utilisation of capital which leads to increasingly severe depressions. Unlimited competition leads to a huge waste of labor, and to that crippling of the social consciousness of individuals which I mentioned before.

This crippling of individuals I consider the worst evil of capitalism. Our whole educational system suffers from this evil. An exaggerated competitive attitude is inculcated into the student, who is trained to worship acquisitive success as a preparation for his future career.

I am convinced there is only one way to eliminate these grave evils, namely through the establishment of a socialist economy, accompanied by an educational system which would be oriented toward social goals. In such an economy, the means of production are owned by society itself and are utilised in a planned fashion. A planned economy, which adjusts production to the needs of the community, would distribute the work to be done among all those able to work and would guarantee a livelihood to every man, woman, and child. The education of the individual, in addition to promoting his own innate abilities, would attempt to develop in him a sense of responsibility for his fellow men in place of the glorification of power and success in our present society.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to remember that a planned economy is not yet socialism. A planned economy as such may be accompanied by the complete enslavement of the individual. The achievement of socialism requires the solution of some extremely difficult socio-political problems: how is it possible, in view of the far-reaching centralisation of political and economic power, to

prevent bureaucracy from becoming all-powerful and overweening? How can the rights of the individual be protected and therewith a democratic counterweight to the power of bureaucracy be assured?

Clarity about the aims and problems of socialism is of greatest significance in our age of transition. Since, under present circumstances, free and unhindered discussion of these problems has come under a powerful taboo, I consider the foundation of this magazine to be an important public service.

[This article by Albert Einstein, the world-famous physicist, was originally published in the inaugural issue of the renowned US socialist magazine, Monthly Review (May 1949).]

***Let us take a pledge
on the occasion
of
India's 70th
Republic Day Celebrations
to uphold Constitutional values.***



Radhey Shiam
Gen. Secretary,
Bhartiya Ekta Parishad (Regd.),
Delhi

Email:
radheyshiamdelhi@gmail.com

Ambedkar's Socialism: Some Reflections

Anand Teltumbde

1. Babasaheb Ambedkar experientially and pragmatically looked at Indian society as structurally unequal because of the caste system that governed what a person born in a particular caste would get. He was naturally attracted to socialism as a system of property equaliser. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the first conscious attempt of mankind towards a socialist future, was welcomed by him as reflected in the publication of a series of articles in all his journals—*Mooknayak*, *Bahishkrit Bharat* and *Janata*. But in India, he thought, emulating such an example would be like putting the cart before the horse.

In *Annihilation of Caste* where Ambedkar provided an elaborate diagnosis, he engaged with the communists who were pushing for a Bolshevik-like revolution in India. He thought that without destroying the caste system, it was not possible to bring about a socialist revolution in India. From this perspective, he asked the socialists, ‘Can you have economic reform without first bringing about a reform of the social order?’ and thought that the socialists had not considered that question.¹

Affirming his belief in socialism, he writes:

‘I do not believe that we can build up a free society in India so long as there is a trace of this ill-treatment and suppression of one class by another. Believing as I do in a socialist ideal, inevitably I believe in perfect equality in the treatment of various classes and groups. I think that Socialism offers the only true remedy for this as well as other problems.’²

Then he questions the understanding of socialism by the socialists:

‘To say that such a belief is enough is to disclose a complete lack of understanding of what is involved in Socialism. If Socialism is a practical programme and is not merely an ideal, distant and far off, the question for a Socialist is not whether he believes in equality. The question for him is whether he minds one class ill-treating and suppressing another class as a matter of system, as a matter of principle and thus allow tyranny and oppression to continue to

divide one class from another. . . . the economic reform contemplated by the Socialists cannot come about unless there is a revolution resulting in the seizure of power. That seizure of power must be by a proletariat.

‘The first question I ask is: Will the proletariat of India combine to bring about this revolution? What will move men to such an action? . . . Men will not join in a revolution for the equalisation of property unless they know that after the revolution is achieved they will be treated equally and that there will be no discrimination of caste and creed. The assurance of a socialist leading the revolution that he does not believe in caste, I am sure, will not suffice. The assurance must be the assurance proceeding from much deeper foundation, namely, the mental attitude of the compatriots towards one another in their spirit of personal equality and fraternity.’³

He further elaborates:

‘If Socialists are not to be content with the mouthing of fine phrases, if the Socialists wish to make Socialism a definite reality then they must recognise that the problem of social reform is fundamental and that for them there is no escape from it. That the social order prevalent in India is a matter which a Socialist must deal with, that unless he does so he cannot achieve his revolution, and that if he does achieve it as a result of good fortune he will have to grapple with the social order if he wishes to realise his ideal—is a proposition which in my opinion is incontrovertible. He will be compelled to take account of caste after revolution, if he does not take account of it before revolution.’⁴

2. In course, he came to define his vision in terms of ‘Liberty, Equality, Fraternity’, insisting that all three of these values should be realised in optimal fashion. The French Revolution, which this slogan is identified with, emphasised liberty which, he saw, degenerated to mean liberty for the rich and powerful to exploit the poor and power-less. Equality, as pursued by the Russian communists,

negated liberty. And both ignored the third, fraternity, which he reckoned by the Deweyan term, 'social endosmosis',⁵ the essence of democracy. Therefore, he added that he had not taken them from the French Revolution but from his master, the Buddha. Literally speaking, it was anachronistic to imagine Buddhism, more than two millennium before, could contain these bourgeois concepts. However, he saw that such a precept could only be conceived and realised in a religion.

In his schema, both religion and the State occupied an important place. Within the frame of liberalism, as I see, he used them as a control mechanism for people; religion exerting primary control over individuals by shaping and controlling their mind; and the State, with its coercive force, ensuring that their outside conduct conformed to law.⁶ Because of this fixation, he could not imagine the world without either religion or State. One of the reasons for his reservations about Marxism was that it (Marxism) hated and discarded both. As a pragmatist, he could not imagine a Marxian utopia where all of these ideals—Liberty, Equality, Fraternity—could be realised together, not in the optimal manner but to the fullest extent, without any need of religion or the State.

Ambedkar gave concrete expression to his socialist vision in *States and Minorities*, the memorandum he wrote on behalf of the Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF) to be submitted to the constituent assembly (CA). It was prepared in the context that SCF would not find any representation in the CA as it did not have enough numbers to elect any. *States and Minorities* contained a proposal for 'State socialism' the CA should adopt in a future constitution. He came to realise, unlike in the days he wrote *Annihilation of Caste*, that unless economic equality is guaranteed, political equality would be superficial and fragile. He imagined that the socialist structure could be hard-coded into the constitution as an unalterable feature.

3. The salient points of his plan were: (i) Industries which were, or might be declared to be, key industries should be owned and run by the State; (ii) Industries which were not key, but basic industries, should be owned by the State and run directly or by its corporations; (iii) Insurance should be a

monopoly of the State, and the State must compel every adult citizen to take out a life insurance policy commensurate with his wages as would be prescribed by the legislature; (iv) Agriculture should be a State industry; (v) The State should acquire agricultural land held by private individuals, whether as owners, tenants or mortgagees, and pay them compensation in the form of debentures equal to the value of their right in the land, with an elaborate provision of how these debentures would be treated; (vi) The agricultural land so acquired shall be leased out in standard sizes to the farming collectives of villagers, formed without distinction of caste or creed, which would cultivate them in accordance with rules and directions issued by the government. The State would provide finance, implements, and requisite inputs such as water, manure, seeds, etc. against the payments to be recovered from the produce. The collective would share the produce among its members in the prescribed manner after settling the payment of charges to the State.⁷

4. Later, he managed to enter the CA with the help of Jogendranath Mandal from the Khulna-Jessore constituency. He was invited to speak on the 'Objective Resolution' presented by Nehru on 13 December 1946. In his speech made on 17 December, while criticising Nehru for his empty rhetoric, he hinted at his plan of State socialism:

'Sir, there are here certain provisions which speak of justice, economical, social and political. If this Resolution has a reality behind it and a sincerity, of which I have not the least doubt, coming as it does from the Mover of the Resolution, I should have expected some provision whereby it would have been possible for the State to make economic, social and political justice a reality and I should have from that point of view expected the Resolution to state in most explicit terms that in order that there may be social and economic justice in the country, that there would be nationalisation of industry and nationalisation of land, 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. Therefore, personally, although I have no objection to the enunciation of these propositions, the Resolution is, to my mind,

somewhat disappointing.⁷⁸

5. The last sentence of this passage, however, was surprising. He said ‘I am however prepared to leave this subject where it is with the observations I have made.’ Why might he have added that? Was it signalling some kind of rapprochement between him and the Congress as subsequent developments indicated? When his membership came to an end with the announcement of the Mountbatten Plan of Partition of 3 June 1947, with which his constituency went over to Pakistan, the Congress decided to get him elected on a Congress ticket before the next session of the CA would convene. Barrister M.R. Jayakar, who had been elected from the Bombay province, had resigned from the Constituent Assembly, and the Congress had planned to get G.V. Mavalankar elected to the CA in his place. But it dropped this plan and decided to bring back Ambedkar in his place. He was subsequently elected to the drafting committee on 29 August 1947 and chosen as its chairman. This volte face on the part of the Congress is typically explained as a change of attitude by the Congress leaders because of the constructive approach he took in his speech.

For instance Gail Omvedt writes:

‘The speech helped change the attitude of leaders like Nehru with regard to Ambedkar. Ambedkar was opposing Partition, he was speaking up for a united government, he supported a strong centre and his left sympathies were well known. Whatever claims that the Congress might have made to be the sole representative of the Untouchables, however thoroughly the SCF had been defeated in the general election, it had established its base firmly in the Marathi speaking areas, in much of the Tamil speaking areas and even in parts of Uttar Pradesh. Leaders like Nehru and Sardar Patel recognised this fact. The SCF’s considerable mobilisation power, not to mention the voting pattern of Dalits themselves, was clear to political leaders. With this background, when Barrister M.R. Jayakar resigned his position in the Constituent Assembly from Bombay province, Nehru and Sardar Patel suggested Ambedkar’s name to fill the vacancy in July 1947.’⁷⁹

6. This observation is not convincing for multiple reasons. First, Ambedkar himself was pleasantly

surprised at being called upon to speak out of turn on the Objective Resolution, which made his speech possible. Second, Ambedkar’s views on some of the issues Omvedt mentions had not become known at that point of time. Third, the argument regarding the mobilising strength of the SCF is not valid. Because not much earlier, the call for direct action given by the SCF against the Cabinet Mission report had evoked a response in only a few pockets and did not pose a threat to the government. Moreover, the Congress was not worried about votes then as it had almost no rival left after Partition. This vote bank consideration would arise only in the late 1960s with the rise of regional parties.

This volte face had far-reaching consequences and could not have been based on such facile reasons. None other than Gandhi was capable of such a strategic feat; only he commanded the force to prevail upon not only Nehru (who was never well disposed towards Ambedkar) and Patel, but the entire Congress to comply. Associating Ambedkar with the Constitution as its framer was a strategic masterstroke as it made the Constitution to be upheld by the lower strata that would be its biggest victim.

7. There was no trace of his State socialism in the entire Constitution. During the CA debates, on 15 November 1949, K.T. Shah, who like Ambedkar was an alumnus of the London School of Economics and the founding President of the United Trade Union Congress, a leftist labour organisation established in 1949, wanted to include the words ‘secular, federal, socialist’ in Article 1 of the Constitution. He inter alia said:

‘And last is the term "socialist". I am fully aware that it would not be quite a correct description of the State today in India to call it a Socialist Union. I am afraid it is anything but Socialist so far. But I do not see any reason why we should not insert here an aspiration, which I trust many in this House share with me, that if not today, soon hereafter, the character and composition of the State will change, change so radically, so satisfactorily and effectively that the country would become a truly Socialist Union of States.’¹⁰

Ambedkar, who in his proposal to the CA vide *States and Minorities* as well as in his debut speech in the CA wanted the Constitution to spell out the

structure of the economy as socialist, rejected it. In reply he said,

‘I regret that I cannot accept the amendment of Prof. K.T. Shah. My objections, stated briefly, are two. In the first place the Constitution . . . is merely a mechanism for the purpose of regulating the work of the various organs of the State. . . . What should be the policy of the State, how the society should be organised in its social and economic side, are matters which must be decided by the people themselves according to time and circumstances. It cannot be laid down in the Constitution itself, because that is destroying democracy altogether. If you state in the Constitution that the social organisation of the State shall take a particular form, you are, in my judgment, taking away the liberty of the people to decide what should be the social organisation in which they wish to live.’¹¹

Not only that, he also called Shah’s amendment ‘purely superfluous’. He said:

‘. . . apart from the Fundamental Rights, which we have embodied in the Constitution, we have also introduced other sections which deal with Directive Principles of State Policy. . . . What I would like to ask Professor Shah is this: If these directive principles . . . are not socialistic in their direction and in their content, I fail to understand what more socialism can be. Therefore my submission is that these socialist principles are already embodied in our Constitution and it is unnecessary to accept this amendment.’¹²

8. To equate directive principles to socialism was absolutely unreasonable. But such was the character of the CA that Shah’s amendment was defeated. We do know now, as Ambedkar himself realised within just two years of the implementation of the Constitution, that the Directive Principles, far from being socialist, were the most ineffectual part of the Constitution. What Shah wanted would ironically be added to the preamble of the Constitution during the Emergency vide the Constitution (Forty-second amendment) Act, 1976. India, the second most unequal country in the world, hitherto would live with that oxymoron.

On 2 September 1953, during a debate on the role and power of the governor in the Rajya Sabha, he retorted to the charge that he was the architect

of the Constitution, saying, ‘My answer is I was a hack. What I was asked to do, I did much against my will. . . . Sir, my friends tell me that I have made the Constitution. But I am quite prepared to say that I shall be the first person to burn it out. I do not want it. It does not suit anybody . . .’ When someone interjected commenting, ‘But you defended it,’ Ambedkar shot back saying, ‘We lawyers defend many things . . .’¹³

9. One more instance may be cited. It is basically his argument against Marxism which might help us to discern the source of his version of socialism. On 20 November 1956, at the 4th World Buddhist Conference at Kathmandu, where he delivered the penultimate speech of his life, ‘Buddha or Karl Marx’, he acknowledged the goals of both to be the same, but the method of the former to accomplish it were superior to the latter’s. He faulted Marx on mainly two counts: one, his reliance on violence; and two, his advocacy of dictatorship. Without getting into the issue whether the distortions of both Buddha as well as Marx were reasonable or not, it is important to note for our purpose that Ambedkar wanted socialism to be achieved through reform and not through violent revolution.

From the above discussion, one thing is clear—though Ambedkar had an abiding interest in Marx, he had serious reservations about his theses. He did not believe in his seemingly deterministic approach towards history; he also did not agree with Marx’s description of communism as one without State, religion or god. He would not accept that in order to achieve socialism, revolutions are inevitable and imagined that it (socialism) could be achieved even through reforms by enlightened elements deploying democratic means.

10. This is exactly what the Fabians thought of socialism. One does not have to belabour in searching for the source of this intellectual orientation of Ambedkar as many scholars—Eleanor Zelliott,¹⁴ K.N. Kadam,¹⁵ Dinkar Khabde,¹⁶ Meera Nanda,¹⁷ just to name a few—have identified the deep-rooted influence one of his professors, John Dewey, had on him while at Columbia. Ambedkar himself would generously acknowledge it in 1952, when he himself was counted amongst the greats,

saying that he owed his entire intellectual being to Dewey.

Dewey, the progenitor of a philosophy that he called instrumentalism, his version of pragmatism, was also the foremost American Fabian socialist. Instrumentalism or pragmatism does not recognise any a priori truth; they maintain that the truth of an idea is determined by its success in the active solution of a problem, and that the value of an idea is determined by its function in human experience. In simple language, it is about being practical, getting things done, doing things a step at a time following a sequential principle, not allowing the best to be the enemy of the good, taking account of others' views, not being hung up on unattainable principles and yielding on some issues in order to make progress on others.

11. These philosophies had their echo in Fabianism born in England just after the death of Marx in 1883. The Fabians believed that socialism could be achieved not through revolution, through an uprising of the workers, but through indoctrination of young scholars. They believed that eventually those intellectual revolutionaries would acquire power and influence in official and unofficial opinion-making and power-wielding agencies of the world. After acquiring control of these organisations, they would quietly establish a socialistic one-world order.¹⁸

Marxist socialism today is considered a failed project because all attempts to achieve it in practice have been unsuccessful. One may have to look at the extent the practice conformed to the theory of Marxism as, despite the motivated efforts of the capitalist block to denigrate it, its fundamental theoretical foundations remain credible. Fabian socialism did not make any such theoretical claim and inevitably degenerated into its antithesis, the worst type of laissez-faire capitalism. Notwithstanding that, a section of Ambedkarites (Dalit bourgeoisie) may disclaim that Ambedkar was a socialist, and their Dalit capitalism may appeal to upwardly mobile Dalit youngsters, but the fact remains that Ambedkar was a socialist. His ideas were, however, acutely constrained by the framework of liberalism and, within that, the impact of Deweyan pragmatism and Fabianism, which is intrinsically incapable of realising his vision of 'liberty, equality, fraternity'.

12. Given the worsening situation of the vast majority of Dalits, the people for whose emancipation he devoted his entire life, it is time for all who crave for radical change in India to review Ambedkar's ideas, particularly of socialism. The issue of caste that he raised and brought to the fore, as well as the vision of society he advocated, cannot be dismissed. It is the methods, the ideological apparatus that informed them, which need a serious review. It is also an undeniable fact that barring a miniscule section of the Dalits, the vast majority continue to suffer from age-old untouchability, discrimination, deprivation and, in addition, increasing atrocities that have been a post-Ambedkar phenomenon but not entirely unconnected with the making of the State that claims his legacy.

If one leaves aside identitarian obsessions, Ambedkar himself lamented many of the outcomes of his methods—the Dalit legislatures elected on reservations, as also educated Dalits and Dalit employees in whom he reposed high hopes—and at the fag end of his life, realised that the measures did not benefit the rural Dalits. One could claim the same about his advocacy of Marxism, as that too suffered serious distortion at the hands of Marxists everywhere, and more so in India. But it nevertheless can still claim theoretical integrity, which is incomparably superior to pragmatism—Fabianism, provided it can open up to accommodate the emerging reality.

(Anand Teltumbde is an educationist, civil rights activist, political analyst and a prolific writer who has written several books with particular emphasis on Left and Dalit movements.)

Footnotes

1. B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, in Vasant Moon (ed.), *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 1. Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 2014, p. 46.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 47.
5. Ibid., p. 57.

Gandhi's Final Fast

Dilip Simeon

Recently I was asked to write a couple of lectures for undergraduate students on the significance of Gandhi and communalism. When I began writing the lectures, which were supposed to be written very simply, I realised that I was not being true to the task of trying to bring across something important about that great man to the younger generation, many of whom may have forgotten him. So I decided to tell his story, and began to research on something on which I had not worked for a very long time. And for this, I simply began to read through Gandhi's last utterances over the last weeks of his life.

When I did that, I realised that Gandhi was speaking to us across time. The way his ideas are put together, it's very clear that it's a conversation. Actually, everything in Gandhi's *Collected Works*, all the discourses and dialogues also, is in the form of a conversation. I realised that at the tail end of his life, he had undertaken a gigantic task and that if we only cared to listen to him, we would see that he said something so important that it resonates even today, and that it would be of great value to us to pay attention to what he was saying.

I realised in short that his last utterances over his last few weeks, especially the one particular week I am going to talk about, were in effect his last testament to the people of India and Pakistan. Let me at this stage point out that he said, "Both India and Pakistan are my countries. I am not going to take a passport for going to Pakistan." So he died at a moment when he was very lonely; he was a citizen of both countries or of neither country, and there was a lot of ambivalence and ambiguity regarding his life.

Ashish Nandy has written a whole essay on the assassination of Gandhi, indicating somewhere that people were fed up of him, and that large numbers of people maybe wanted him to die. We are speaking now on the eve of the anniversary of his death; tomorrow will be the anniversary of his death. Until the time when I was a schoolboy, or even later, I remember that on Gandhi *Shahadat Divas* there would always be a moment's silence.

We would stand up, there would be a siren blown over the city, and we would know that this is the time when Gandhi was assassinated. Now we do not know. Perhaps many people do not even know the significance of January the 30th.

Anyway, I will try to sum up a few salient events and utterances of Gandhi in the first half of what I am going to say, and then in the second part I will try to give you some kind of interpretation of why I see this as his last will and testament.

He went on fast on the 13th of January 1948. Now, this is very very important, this was his last fast: from January the 13th, 1948 till January the 18th. It was to be his fifteenth fast in public life (but some people have a different calculation about the number of fasts he undertook). Be that as it may, about this fast, many people say many things. One belief that is particularly widespread is that Gandhi went on fast to get Rs 55 crores transferred from India to Pakistan, and therefore he was betraying the country.

Actually the immediate reason for this fast was his demand that the mosque in Mehrauli (the shrine of Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki) be returned to Muslims. It had been seized. I want to have you listen to his own words on this, but I'll proceed step by step.

It is 1947. Gandhi arrived in Delhi on the 9th of September from Calcutta. He was en route. He wanted to travel to what had become Pakistan, but en route he stopped in Delhi. The last few months of his life were all spent in trying to grapple with the consequences of partition and the terrible communal outrage and upsurge that was taking place in those days. It started with the so-called Great Calcutta Killing of August 1946 which some of you may have heard of. And after that there were a series of riots in Bihar. Gandhi went to Noakhali in Bengal and he spent several months there trying to bring about some kind of communal peace. Now, this was the time when India was also becoming independent, and Gandhi was isolated. He was isolated from high

politics but he was very close to his people. This is the most astonishing thing. When all his lieutenants were engaged in high political activities, Gandhi was actually spending most of his time with the most ordinary and humble people of India.

When Gandhi came to Delhi in September 1947 by train, he had come with the idea of proceeding further to Punjab where rioting was going on. But when he came to Delhi, he realised that he could not leave. There were large numbers of Muslims who had been killed in Delhi. On the other hand, there were thousands and thousands of Hindus and Sikhs who were refugees, who had suffered in communal massacres and riots in Punjab, and who had come to Delhi. Delhi was a gigantic armed camp and a refugee camp. In Diwan Hall, Chandni Chowk, Kingsway Camp, there were the Hindu and Sikh refugees from Punjab, while in Purana Qila and Jamia Milia, there were large numbers of Muslim refugees from inside Delhi itself and from the outskirts—there were riots against Mewatis and they had come to Delhi from Mewat region to take refuge. And so Delhi was full of refugees of all kinds.

Gandhi started working amongst them. He travelled to Panipat, he travelled to Gurgaon, he lived in Delhi. In Delhi, he was told that he could not live in the Bhangi Basti where he always used to live. He used to live in the sweepers' colony whenever he was in Delhi, but now he was disallowed from doing so by the Home Minister who feared for his safety and he was put up in what is now Gandhi Smriti, that is the Birla House. From there he was constantly in communication with hordes of people ranging from politicians to the very very humble people who came and visited him.

During these days, his thoughts and his dialogues and utterances were on what was going on around him. Thus, for instance, he would hold regular prayer meetings. In these prayer meetings he would read out passages from the Quran, he would read out passages from the Gita, and from the Bible. And in those days, he found more and more people objecting. People would object to him reading anything from the Quran, and then he would keep silence. This happened towards the end of his life also; in 1948 also, people would object because they would be full of hatred, and then he would say that there is nothing contained here which you could possibly

object to. Repeatedly there would be objections; on one occasion there were three days in a row where he was prevented from reading out from the Quran. And then finally, on the appeal of other people (?) in the hall, he was allowed to continue reading.

Now, just as a reminder of some of the salient aspects of his life, I would simply like to remind you of a very very interesting fact that two of the most staunchly militant so-called communities in India, the Sikhs and the Pathans, were also the most staunch Gandhians during the national movement. There is no time to go into the details of this, but I will just point out to you that in the early 1920s, there was the Akali movement. The origins of the Akali movement go back to the movement to recapture the Gurudwaras from the control of the pro-British Mahants. This happened in the aftermath of Jallianwala Bagh which you may have heard of. The head Granthi of Darbar Sahib, the Golden Temple, had invited General Dyer to the Golden Temple and presented him with a Saropa. This outraged the Sikhs who then launched a campaign for getting the Gurudwaras back into their control. So this was a movement which was of a community but it was also an anti-imperialist and anti-colonial movement.

One of their agitations was called the Guru Ka Bagh Satyagraha, to get control of Nanak's birthplace from the pro-British Mahants. This satyagraha was witnessed by a man called C.F. Andrews. I want to read his narration out to you because this is a very very moving eye-witness account. C.F. Andrews, as you know, was Gandhi's close associate and friend. He was a Christian missionary and a sympathiser of the Indian national movement. He wrote this eyewitness account dated September 12, 1922:

“When I . . . stood face to face with the ultimate moral contest I could understand the strained look and the lips which silently prayed. It is a sight I never wish to see again, a sight incredible to an Englishman. There were four Akali Sikhs with their black turbans facing a band of a dozen police including two English officers. They walked slowly up to the line of the police . . . and were standing silently in front of them . . . Their hands were placed together in prayer. Then without the slightest provocation on their part the Englishman lunged forward with the head of his laathi which was bound

with brass. The blow which I saw was sufficient to fell the Akali Sikh and send him to the ground. He rolled over and slowly got up once more and faced the same punishment over and over again. Time after time one of the four . . . was laid prostrate by repeated blows, now from the English officer, now from the police. The police committed acts which were brutal and extreme.” He goes on to describe some of these.

Andrews further wrote: “The Akali Sikhs were . . . largely from the Army. They had served in many campaigns in France, in Flanders, in Mesopotamia and in East Africa (with the British Army during the First World War) . . . Now, they were now felled to the ground at the hands of English official serving in the same government in which they themselves had served. . . . But each blow was turned into a triumph by the spirit in which it was endured. . . . The vow they had made to God was kept to the letter. The onlookers too . . . were praying with them. . . . These were strong Sikh soldiers and they were praying. It was very rarely that I witnessed any Akali Sikh who went forward to suffer, flinch from a blow when it was struck. The blows were received one by one without resistance.” This is C.F. Andrew’s assessment. He wrote, “There has been something far greater in this event than a mere dispute about land and property. It has gone far beyond the technical questions of legal possession or distraint. A new heroism, learnt through suffering, has arisen in the land. A new lesson in moral warfare has been taught to the world.”

This was the Akali agitation. It’s a fascinating account, you can go into it in detail and study it, but it is a very interesting reflection that the origins of the Akali movement were in Gandhian resistance. Later on, the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee Act was passed and these gurudwaras were indeed handed back to the Sikhs.

Let me also briefly mention another community upon whom Gandhi’s ahimsa had such a profound impact. And this is all the more strange. I’m talking about the Pathans. Today, the Pathans are only known for militancy, and Taliban and fundamentalism and jihadis, etc., and the Americans and Europeans and Nato are engaging with the Pakhtuns. I don’t know whether they have the slightest knowledge of the fact that this is the area, the homeland, of Khan Abdul

Ghaffar Khan. This is the homeland of a man who is called the Frontier Gandhi. This is the homeland of a man who is probably the foremost bhakt of Gandhiji, Abdul Ghaffar Khan.

This movement that he created there was called the Khudai Khidmatgars. It’s really one of the most shining examples of Gandhian satyagraha in the history of India. But today, neither Indians know it, nor do Pakistanis know about it. It’s worth remembering. The Khudai Khidmatgar movement is also known as the Red Shirt movement. It’s a movement which began in the late 1920s. This is around the time that Ghaffar Khan met Gandhi, but actually he had been politicised in jail in the early 1920s through his contact with a person called Baba Khadak Singh, who was an Akali. So it is an Akali who gave the message of Gandhi’s non-violence to Badshah Khan, who was in any case inclined that way, and then he gave his assent, one of our foremost and tallest followers of Gandhiji.

But what’s very interesting is an incident that took place in 1930 in the bazaar of Peshawar. It’s called Kissa Khani Bazaar. This is an area where there was a big Civil Disobedience movement going on, and eyewitness reports say that in those days the streets of Peshawar were resounding with slogans which we would find very odd to hear today—‘Allah-ho-Akbar’ and ‘Mahatma Gandhi ki jai’.

Around that time, the Khudai Khidmatgars had virtually taken over the whole city for a few days. The British sent their most loyal regiments of the Garhwal Rifles to crush this, crush the Civil Disobedience movement, which was still non-violent. And in the course of that, there was a certain platoon led by a hawaldar called Chandra Singh Garhwali. Again this is a hero whom we have all forgotten. We should remember him.

Chandra Singh Garhwali was given the order to open fire on the Pathans. It was an Englishman who gave the order to fire. Chandra Singh Garhwali retracted the order to fire. He reportedly said to the English officer that “Sir, these are my countrymen and the Indian army was not meant to shoot Indians.” And thereafter of course he was cashiered and sent to jail and so on. Rahul Sankrityayan has written a whole book on Chandra Singh Garhwali, it’s fascinating.

There are some very nice stories of how Chandra Singh Garhwali had first met Gandhiji in 1929 when he had gone up to Bageshwar. Gandhiji was giving some pravachan at some holy spot, and this man had worn his military hat. Gandhiji commented on his hat and said in a half joking way, “Do you think you can intimidate me with your military hat?” He replied that he would gladly wear the Gandhi topi. Then someone gave him a Gandhi topi and he threw it back. He said, “Mai boodhe se hi loonga.” Gandhi then handed him the cap. He then stood up and did namaste and said one day maybe I'll be worthy of this.

The same Chandra Singh Garhwali in 1930 refused to open fire on the Pathan demonstrators. Now these are just little stories I am telling you in order to focus on certain things. One is that the Sikhs and the Pathans were some of the most staunch Gandhians in the Indian national movement. I'm telling you this only in order for us to be able to reflect on the power and the stature of his personality. You see, if you simply look at his identity, since nowadays everybody focuses on the cultural and the religious identity of someone, then he was a Sanatani Hindu and a Baniya from Gujarat. It is very unlikely that Pathans and Sikhs would acquire such a devotional and worshipful attitude towards a person who is just a baniya in a dhoti. But if you look at the impact that he had . . .

In 1938, for the first time, he was allowed to travel to the North-West Frontier Province. The British used to allow Jinnah to go there, they used to allow Maulanas to go there, but they never allowed Gandhi to go there.

And when he went there, he told his lieutenants that you see I will never see any guns over here, I don't want to see any rifles and guns. And there are photographs of that episode. You can get an impression of his impact on them if you just look at the expression on their faces. But anyway . . .

On 22nd of December 1947, Gandhi made an announcement, and I'll read out what he said: “Some eight or ten miles from here in Mehrauli there is a shrine of Qutub-ud-din Bakhtiyar Chishti. It is esteemed to be second only to the shrine at Ajmer. It is visited every year not only by Muslims, but thousands of non-Muslims. Last September this shrine was subjected to the wrath of Hindu mobs.

The Muslims living in the vicinity of the shrine for the last eight hundred years had to leave their homes. I mention this sad episode to you that though Muslims love the shrine, no Muslim can be found anywhere near it. It is the duty of Hindus, Sikhs and the officials of the government to open the shrine, and wash this stain off us. The same applies to other shrines and religious places of Muslims in and around Delhi.”

So this is the background to his last fast, from 13th to 18th of January 1948. When it began on the thirteenth, Gandhiji said, “I have started my fast. Many people cannot understand what I am doing, who are the offenders—Hindus or Sikhs or Muslims. . . I do not blame anyone.” He said, “I will terminate the fast only when peace has returned to Delhi. If peace is restored to Delhi it will have an effect not only on India but on Pakistan.” When he was closely questioned about this, people asked him who is it against, he said that it is against the Hindus and Sikhs of India, and it is against the Muslims of Pakistan. He said that all religious places should be returned to the people to whom they belonged.

The point about this is that Gandhi's actions saved us from a predicament of having something like a Babri Masjid controversy on the doorstep of the capital. Few people realise the importance of this. It was a tremendously powerful act. Delhi became visibly affected by this fast. Maulana Azad addressed a gathering of up to three lakh people on the 17th of January, where he announced certain tests and preconditions that Gandhi had posed to him which were fairly simple: that people should be free to move around without any fear; that the property of all communities should be safe; and that Muslims who had been chased out of Delhi should be asked to come back.

Gandhi ended his fast on the 18th. Large numbers of people were coming to see him, but interestingly there were also large numbers of people who were marching past saying, ‘Let Gandhi die’. I am trying to evoke for you the kind of conditions that were prevailing. The atmosphere was full of trauma and hatred. When he used to go to his prayer meetings, there were people weeping and screaming at him. It was not that everybody said, ‘Oh what a great Mahatma he is’. There were people full of hatred for him, people who said that: ‘You are a Muslim

lover; you are the man responsible for the deaths of all the Hindus and Sikhs in Punjab; you are the man responsible for the partition of India; you are the man responsible for all this calamity.’ Actually he was not, there were many other actors in the drama. But such was the atmosphere prevailing; people were venting their feelings and he was trying to calm them.

The impression I get from reading about his last utterances is one of a man of immense and extraordinary strength. Even reading about it is so painful . . . when you realise what was going on, what must have happened to the people who had experienced this.

Anyway. When he was on fast, people were coming to him everyday and he was speaking everyday, despite the fact that he was on fast. He was speaking very weakly. And people from Rajendra Prasad, Abul Kalam Azad, Jawaharlal Nehru and Shah Nawaz Khan (the general from the INA) to even the Pakistan high commissioner were coming to him and saying, ‘Please lift the fast’. The Pakistan high commissioner, a man called Zahid Hussain, said that I’m getting calls everyday from Pakistan asking about your health.

The fast had an impact on Delhi. I’m telling you all this because this is our city, where these things happened in 1948. It had a big impact. Processions of Muslims were taken out in Sabzi Mandi, and their Hindu neighbours offered them sweets, and so on. It did have a calming effect on the population of Delhi, undoubtedly.

And then a declaration was made on the 18th of January 1948. It’s a very interesting declaration, which was signed by everybody. It was not a legal document, but a kind of ethical and moral document which was signed in the presence of Gandhi, which again people have forgotten about. It was signed by all these top leaders, including members of the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha.

“We wish to announce that it is our heartfelt desire that Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs and members of 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's Mazaar will be held this year as in the previous years. Muslims will be able to move around in Sabzi Mandi, Karol Bagh and 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 . . . We shall not object to the return to Delhi of the Muslims who have migrated from here . . . We assure that all these things will be done by our personal effort and not with the help of the police or military.” This is very significant. And then finally, “We request Mahatmaji to believe us and to give up his fast . . .”

So this is the declaration made on the 18th of January 1948, and then Gandhi made a very very moving speech in response to that declaration which I don’t want to read out, there’s no time (published in “Another Time, Another Mosque”, *Janata*, December 9, 2018), but you can see all these things in volume 97 and 98 of Gandhi’s *Collected Works* online.

Now I will try to sum up for you my interpretation of all these things, in terms of what I call his last testament. In the last weeks of his life, Gandhi spoke his mind to all citizens of India and Pakistan. And I’m saying, this is almost in the form of a *bhavishyavani*. The things that he said about what is going to happen to India and Pakistan are indeed coming true. They are coming true before us today. So when I read these things and when you read about them . . . if you see what he said . . . you get the impression that the man is talking to you personally. Even though sixty years have passed, what he’s saying has profound significance for us and the people of Pakistan. I’m saying all this because frankly, simply as a political observer, when I look ahead for the next ten years, I find a pattern . . . I mean I can sense that there is some kind of disintegration going on, and that we are once again going to be faced with the consequences of partition. That is, the consequences of the partition of India are still with us. And Gandhi was a man who in those days was saying that this was a sin. He was telling the Pakistanis that this was a sin against Islam. And he was telling Hindus that while he also believed in Akhand Bharat, it should not be won by conquest and violence. It can only be achieved by love. It cannot happen if we hate people so much.

So he spoke his mind to all citizens of India and

Pakistan. As I said, he spoke as a citizen of neither country, or as a citizen of both countries. He spoke freely as was his habit, not sparing anyone, always with respect and an appeal to their better side. He asked Pakistan's rulers to ensure the safety of minorities and predicted that Pakistan would be an impermanent entity unless it evolved a secular polity. How true this is! He warned those who were pained by partition that Akhand Bharat or United India could only be established by love and mutual respect, never by force. He spoke to community leaders whose utterances pained him, including Muslim leaders who had called him a kafir, and the RSS and Hindu Mahasabha who hated him for the respect that he showed to Islam and Muslims.

He discussed the matter of the Somnath temple in Kathiawar, insisting that its restoration could not be paid for by the Government of India which was a secular state but only by private donations from devout Hindus. He said, we have formed the government for all. It is a secular government, that is, it does not belong to any particular religion. Hence it cannot spend money on the basis of communities. Now mind you, this is a Sanatani Hindu. Jinnah was a secular Muslim. Gandhiji was a Sanatan Dharmi but he was asking for a secular state, while Jinnah was calling for a state based on a communal principle.

He addressed Sikh refugees in the company of Sheikh Abdullah who was visiting from Kashmir, and hailed the example of Kashmiri Muslims in maintaining communal harmony. He spoke to Sikhs warning them never to misuse the kirpan. The day he ended his fast was Guru Gobind Singh's birthday. Gandhi sent a message to Sikhs congratulating them for their victory over anger and ended his message with the slogan '*Waheguru ji di fateh*'. He sent a special message to fellow Gujaratis. He discussed the issue of a national language and his preference for Hindustani. He spoke to caste Hindus about the evil of untouchability. After recounting the painful experience of oppressed castes of Rohtak, he admonished Jats and Ahirs for tormenting them and treating them as slaves. He talked about the Meos, renamed 'criminal tribes' by the British, who had been forcefully evicted from vast areas in Delhi's hinterland and called for their rehabilitation. He criticised the Congress party very

severely, especially certain Congressmen who had begun using power for personal benefit. He spoke to social organisations such as Hindustani Talimi Sangh, Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust and Harijan Sevak Sangh.

He spoke about the individual, he spoke about the community, he spoke about philosophical ideas, religion and the concept of ahimsa. And most of all, he spoke words of comfort to refugees crazed by grief, listening calmly to their abuses, and even hatred. 'Let Gandhi Die' were the slogans raised by some people while he was on fast. After the fast he continued the custom of reading from the Quran and other holy books, and despite protests he continued to do this. He asked everyone to see reason, to give up the ways of Satan, to remember the best part of their tradition.

But Gandhi was also a man in pain. Now we come to the final part which is his assassination and the effects of it. In his prayer meeting of 25th of November 1947, he had spoken about those who had been deprived of their homes. "If we come to our senses here today, everything will be well tomorrow: I too will be free. Today I am very much disturbed," said Gandhi. "My life has become a burden to me. I wonder why I am still here. I could become strong if Delhi were restored to sanity, and then I would rush to West Punjab and tell the Muslims who have gone away from here that I've prepared the ground for them and they could come back anytime they wanted and live wherever they chose. . . . But today I have become a sort of burden. There was a time when my word was law. But it is no longer so." As I said, and you could read Nandy's essay on this, perhaps he sensed that he was about to die.

On the 20th of January, a bomb exploded seventy five feet away from his desk at Birla Bhavan, that is now called Gandhi Smriti. One person called Madanlal Pahwa was arrested. Six other men escaped in a taxi. This was the fifth attempt on his life since 1934. All of them were made by extreme Hindu nationalists. Gandhi was unruffled. Upon being asked by the DIG to agree to additional policemen he refused, saying that his life was in the hands of God. And that if he had to die, no precautions could save him. He would not agree to any restrictions on entry to his prayer meetings. So people were free to come and go, even assassins.

At the meeting the day after the bomb exploded, he said, “The man who exploded the bomb obviously thinks he has been sent by God to destroy me.” Incidentally, if you read Nathuram Godse’s statement to the court, you’ll see that Nathuram Godse actually thought that he was an avatar of Vishnu, that he had been sent by Vishnu to finish off the evil-doers. So here is Gandhi saying on the 21st of January that “You should not have any kind of hate against the person who was responsible for this. He had taken for granted that I am an enemy of Hinduism. . . . When he says he was doing the bidding of God, he is only making God an accomplice, an accomplice in a wicked deed. But it cannot be so. Therefore, those who are behind him or whose tool he is, should know that this sort of thing will not save Hinduism. If Hinduism has to be saved, it will be saved through such work as I am doing. I have been imbibing Hindu dharma right from my childhood.”

On the 30th of January, one Nathuram Godse, editor of a Poona Marathi journal called *Hindu Rashtra*, shot at him three times at point blank range and killed him. The history of this crime is very very complex. It is worth reading what Nathuram Godse had to say about why he killed him; you can see a kind of Mahabharat-type epic symbolism in whatever he was saying. Ordinary concepts of law, morality, ethics did not enter the frame. It was like an epic confrontation and he said, ‘with due respect for Mahatma, I had to kill him because he has destroyed Hinduism and India’, and so on.

However, I can tell you another very interesting fact, and this I can tell you as a person who was in the Maoist movement in my youth. There was one prominent Maoist, the left-hand man of Charu Majumdar, whose name was Saroj Dutta. If you read his writings on Gandhi and the type of vituperation and abuse that he directed at Gandhi, there is very little difference between what a Maoist had to say and what Nathuram Godse had to say about Gandhi. In terms of their comments on Gandhi, their moral is exactly the same. Anyway.

What happened thereafter is very interesting and I will try to sum up with this. There was a trial, and in the trial eight people were put on trial. Two people were convicted and hanged in November 1949, Nathuram Godse and Narayan Apte, and one person was acquitted. Five people were sent to jail

for fourteen years. Actually they were sent to jail for life, and they were released in fourteen years. And the person who was acquitted was a man called Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. Savarkar’s involvement in the conspiracy was attested to during the trial, but the judge wanted corroborative evidence and for lack of corroborative evidence, Savarkar was let off.

Subsequently there was an outrage in the country, especially because when those five men were released there were sweets distributed in Pune at which Savarkar was also present. There was a lot of outrage that these people are celebrating the murder of the Mahatma. At that point, a commission of inquiry was set up, called the Justice Jivan Lal Kapur Commission of Inquiry into the Assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. That commission conducted fresh hearings and also interviewed the bodyguard and the personal secretary of Savarkar. Clinching evidence was found that the assassins were actually with Savarkar a few days before the assassination, and also before, in the planning. Jivan Lal Kapur came to the conclusion that there is no other theory possible for the assassination, but that the conspiracy involved Vinayak Damodar Savarkar at its head.

This man, Savarkar, his portrait has now been hung in the central hall of parliament. It’s almost as if we as a country are celebrating the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. People don’t know about this. I feel that at least we should know exactly what we are doing.

Now Gandhi died standing up with God’s name on his lips, just as he had always wanted to. He had always said that he was prepared to die for his beliefs. His death could have been prevented. Who can say what would have happened had he been allowed to perform his padyatra to Pakistan. But it was not to be. “In the eyes of too many officials”, and this is a quote from a biographer of Gandhi called Robert Payne, “he was an old man who had outlived his usefulness: he had become expendable. By negligence, by indifference, by deliberate desire on the part of many faceless people, the assassination had been accomplished. It was a new kind of murder—the permissive assassination, and there may be many more in the future.”

Now I will conclude. There’s lots more to tell you, but we have limited time. Until the mid- 1940s, the cycle of partition-related communal massacres

had not begun. In the twilight of British power, certain political groups and leaders had thrown away the chance of accommodation, despite the opportunities available. So now I'm talking about the 1930s and even early 40s. There was a chance of political accommodation. I'm speaking all these things from the standpoint of the partition of India which, as I began by saying, still hangs heavy on us.

But Gandhi spoke of love and mutual respect in the midst of hatred and carnage. Some were pessimists even when there was hope. Gandhi gave people hope even in the midst of despair. He appealed to their better instinct at the worst of times. This is the message of Gandhi's final fast of January 1948. It is a message from a man of extraordinary strength and courage. After he died, politicians argued about whether he is the son of the nation or the father of the nation. I believe actually that he is neither. He is the foundation. He is the foundation of the Indian Union, and if you reflect carefully on it you will discover why.

The history of the subcontinent after the death of Gandhi is beyond the scope of what we are discussing. But it's enough to recall that Jinnah's Pakistan lasted only twenty-four years. It ended in 1971. It's noteworthy that the bulk of the people of Pakistan walked out of Pakistan in 1971. And the

logic of communal strife did not end. Gandhi was very right. If we cannot sort out this matter, we will pass under the control of foreign powers. And indeed that seems to be happening. But two symbolic events tell us something about how we have treated the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi.

One is in 1998. We exploded nuclear devices in Pokhran. Gandhiji . . . you can imagine what he would have said . . . he had said about the atom bomb . . . I've written about this . . . 'future generations will curse the scientist who invented this atom bomb'.

And in February 2003, the top Indian political leadership placed the portrait of the man behind Gandhi's assassination in the central hall of parliament. Einstein had famously said of Gandhi, "Generations to come will scarcely believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth." Less well known is the fact that in the year 2000, global readers of the BBC website were asked to comment on who they thought was the greatest man of the millennium. It was Mahatma Gandhi.

Thank you.

(Dilip Simeon formerly taught history at Ramjas College in Delhi, and is presently visiting faculty at Ashoka University, Sonapat. This is the transcript of the Ahimsa Day talk delivered by him at Indraprastha College, Delhi University in January 2010.)

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Gandhi, Marx and the Ideal of an ‘Unalienated Life’

Akeel Bilgrami interviewed by Jipson John and Jitheesh P.M.

In your famous essay “Gandhi, the Philosopher”, you were making a fresh reading of Mahatma Gandhi as a philosopher. In your own words you were “struck by the integrity of his ideas”. What do you mean by “integrity” in Gandhi’s ideas?

That essay was written over 20 years ago and it is almost as if I was prompted to write it in order to register something quite personal. I grew up in a home, a secular Muslim home, in which Nehru was held in such affection and admiration that one thought of him as if he were an elderly member of one’s own family. My father would refer to him as “Jawaharlal” even though he hadn’t, so far as I know, ever met him. Growing up, I had read almost everything he had written, including many of the speeches and less well-known writings that have been collected. Gandhi was respected, of course, but he was a more distant figure. And I had not read anything but his autobiography. When I began to read Gandhi in the early 1990s, I realised—slowly, reluctantly, overcoming my upbringing—that he was a far deeper and far more original thinker than Nehru. Even where one disagreed with him, one saw how strikingly independent his thinking was, how he came to familiar issues from surprising angles. And one very striking feature of his work, I realised, was that, at its most ambitious, you couldn’t see many of the things he said about politics as being independent of his much more abstract thought about human nature and experience, about moral values, and about the nature of what he took the concept of “truth” to be. Very specific political claims he made were of a piece with, perhaps even derivable from, his views regarding these more remote notions. It is this integration of politics with high philosophy that I described with the term “integrity”.

Mahatma Gandhi was a mass leader who fought the British and led the national movement. At the same time, he was leading a spiritual life

and experimenting with spiritual practices and what he himself described as “my experiments with truth”. This was quite unique and rare. No modern great figure combined both in such a unique fashion anywhere in the world. Would you agree?

Yes, I would. There is a great tendency today to think that Gandhi’s political successes (as a historical figure who made a tremendous difference to the direction that Indian politics took) have an interest for us quite independent of his philosophy. I think, actually, that this is a preposterous view. Not only would he not have had those successes in the effect his actions had on people and, therefore, on events, but I don’t think we would be talking about him incessantly today in classrooms and in drawing rooms in the way we do, not to mention writing about him in journals and books, if he wasn’t the philosopher he so manifestly was. He simply would not have had the impact he did on his colleagues and he would not have generated the prodigious mobilisations he did, if his political actions were not integrated with his philosophical ideas. That integrity is undoubtedly an essential element in the appeal he had for the Indian masses. It is those who don’t see the mass of a country’s people as capable of responding to such integrity and who see them responding only to his political skills that have this cramped view of Gandhi; and I think it is a view that reveals an undemocratic understanding of mass politics, of what the mass of people are capable of and of what they are responding to.

Generally, Gandhi and Marx are considered as two great figures who are at two poles. But you have identified some important similarities between them. This is based on your argument that both shared a similar critique of modernity as they considered alienation from nature and us as the basic traits of modernity. What are the similarities of thought in Gandhi and Marx and

how do you explain it in the context of modernity?

Yes, as you know, Gandhi was quite roundly criticised by the Left both in India and abroad for many decades. I don't particularly want to comment on the contemporary Leftist writers who have taken to anti-Gandhian invective. And, in any case, it would be absurd to think that Gandhi did not make some serious political mistakes or to deny that he had views that were sometimes quite wrong. But I do think that there is a very interesting and very original "radical" or left-wing Gandhi to be unearthed from his writings and many of his deeds as well. In doing so, one has to be selective, of course. But that is true of most important thinkers. Like all of them, Gandhi's thought and writings contained inconsistencies, but in a way it is worse with him, no doubt because, though he was a remarkable philosopher, he was not a salaried philosopher who strives for consistency—he often said and wrote things in the context of immediate political demands from the world around him and those remarks were, as one should expect, sometimes at odds with what he said in more reflective writings.

It was Irfan Habib, in some articles, who first broke away from some of the Leftist clichés about Gandhi. I had not read these when I wrote that early essay. Irfan Saheb's sympathetic perspective was, in any case, historical. My initial interest in Gandhi was far more philosophical.

The affinities with Marx that I have recorded are admittedly not on the surface of either of their writings. It is a matter of interpretation both of Gandhi and of Marx. In Marx, I stress the early writings and the very late writings of his last decade on the Russian *mir*. And I try to understand the monumental analysis of capital through both these. As for Gandhi, I see him—in a work like *Hind Swaraj* but also in a vast number of dispatches and letters of his that have been collected (including the remarkable correspondence with Tagore)—as someone who thought that India, at the time he was writing (*Hind Swaraj* was published in 1909), was on the cusp that Europe was in the *Early Modern* period. And he did not want India to go down the path that Europe had taken from Early Modernity to Late Modernity. He thought that alternatives to that path were entirely possible for India and in this respect his outlook shares something with Marx

in the last period of his life when he was writing about Russia's peasant communes. In these writings, Marx argued that countries like Russia (and there is some discussion of India, too, with very revealing criticism of people like Henry Maine) need not go through the incubation of capitalism that Europe had gone through in order to seek a revolutionary transformation. Of course, Gandhi was not a socialist and didn't seek, in his visionary hopes, a socialist future for India. I would go so far as to say that Gandhi had no serious understanding of the notion of "class", as we have come to think of it. But he hated capitalism and what it did to human mentality and human society. *Hind Swaraj* is really about this last theme. And *Hind Swaraj* is so shrill and extreme in its anti-modernism, I think, because Gandhi was anxiously (but shrewdly) aware that if capitalism begins to take hold, it really gets very entrenched in ways that it had in the passage from Early to Late Modernity in Europe, and it then affects all human attitudes and social relations very adversely and very pervasively and deeply.

But even putting aside these affinities with Marx, if I am right that Gandhi thought India was at the crossroads that Europe was in the Early Modern period, and that he wanted to pre-empt the developments in political economy (and their deleterious cognitive and social effects) that occurred in subsequent European modernity, then an equally good comparison is with other radical dissenting voices in Early Modern Europe. For that reason, I have situated a lot of Gandhi's thinking as being in intellectual alliance, not just with Marx, but with pre-Marxian radical thinkers like Gerrard Winstanley in Early Modernity, who sought to pre-empt developments (in England, in his case) that he presciently foresaw as emerging from the enclosures movement and the privatisation of the commons and the converting of agrarian ways of life into what we would now call "agri-business".

How do you intellectually deal with the concept of modernity? How modernity shaped and influenced us in all parts of the world. What about the criticisms of modernity raised by many theorists for its "instrumental rationality", "Western-centric nature", "anti-religious", "Grand narrative", etc.?

I do feel that one cannot have been anti-imperialist through the last century without having, *in some sense*, been anti-modern. I say “in some sense” and mean it. It’s not obvious at all what that sense of anti-modern exactly is and ought to be. That is a very complex question. Many bad answers have been given to that question. A lot of my work has been struggling with that question. Though there are many more subtle things to say, the first and obvious thing to notice is an elementary transitivity: imperialism is essential to capitalism and since capitalism is an economic formation of modernity, being anti-imperialist in any fundamental way is necessarily to be opposed to capitalism and that would, *eo ipso*, mean being opposed to modernity. Of course, many who sought independence from colonial rule were not opposed to imperialism in any deep way, so they never accepted this simple point. But it is this point that brought Gandhi and the Left together. The Left, of course, focussed much more directly on the economic structures of colonialism and an emerging capitalism in its opposition, whereas Gandhi’s opposition, as I said earlier, was more focussed on the cognitive and cultural fall-out of capitalist modernity.

You list a number of portmanteau terms towards the end of your question to summarise recent theoretical critical angles on modernity. I find each one of them, as they have been wielded by critics of modernity, a little too blunt. So take, for instance, “instrumental rationality” used as a term of opprobrium. What is it meant to convey? Very broadly speaking, it is meant to capture how, in modernity, we have made reason too focussed on how to identify and pursue the most efficient means for the goals that have emerged in bourgeois society. Now, opposing this tendency of reason (let us, for the sake of abbreviation, call that anti-instrumentalism), would require very careful attentiveness to the detail of what “instrumentality” or “instrumentalism” amounts to. Gandhi understood this well. As I say in some of my writing on him, he asks a genealogical question about modernity that seems to be anti-instrumentalist, that seems to have located a very general instrumentality that he opposes: “How and when did we transform the concept of the “world” as not merely a place to live in but a place to master and control?” But that question is so general, so

omnibus, that one has no idea how to go about answering it. In Gandhi’s work, we find that he breaks it down to four different detailed questions: How and when did we transform the concept of *nature* to the concept of *natural resources*? How and when did we transform the concept of *human beings* to the concepts of *citizens*? How and when did we transform the concept of *people* into the concept of *populations*? And, how and when did we transform the concept of *knowledges* (to live by) into the concept of *expertise* (to rule by)? Now, if one goes on to answer all these questions in specific detail and then return to show in detail how these answers are not answers to four *miscellaneous* questions, but, at bottom, answers to the *same* question (the initial omnibus question) only then would we have said something meaningful by deploying the term “anti-instrumentalism”. Until then, it is all just airy hand-waving and clichés about “means and ends”. Similar cautionary points can be made about all the anti-modernity critical terms you cite.

One line of criticism I pursue in trying to understand the failures of modernity is to point out first (what is surely widely known) that its two chief sloganised ideals of “liberty” and “equality”, as soon as they were articulated by the political Enlightenment, were theoretically and methodologically developed in such a way that they were in tension with one another. This is for reasons that have been well-studied such as, for instance, most conspicuously the fact that the possession of property bestowed on the possessor a notion of liberty that became erected into the law of the land as a fundamental right everywhere in the spread of liberal modernity. How this generates tensions with the goal of equality are so well-known and so well mined that I don’t need to say anything more about it. Much less well-studied is another source of the tension between liberty and equality, which comes from the incentivisation of talent that owes to liberty attaching to notions of desert. For centuries, when there was some excellence of production (say, a work of art), it was the *zeitgeist* which produced it that got the praise and admiration. If you take the long historical view, it is relatively recently that individual talent began to get the praise and reap the reward for such productions. And this happened partly out of a growing *ideological* view that to

praise the zeitgeist for such excellence was to deny a person's individuality, it was to see the individual person responsible for these productions as mere physical embodiments of the zeitgeist. Thus, notions of dessert became tied to the notion of individual liberty and talent thereby got incentivised. Indeed, it became part of a generalised liberty because it spread over to the idea of the liberty of *others to enjoy* the excellence of the productions of individual talent since the latter now was incentivised to be as excellent as it could be. So, by the time you come to our contemporary times, you have merit raises for salaried professionals, bonuses for bankers, endorsements for sportsmen, prizes for authors of books, on and on... all in the name of individual liberty; and it should be obvious how all this too gives rise to tensions with aspirations to equality. For these (and other) reasons, then, modernity's main political tradition developed its two great ideals of liberty and equality in a way that they *could not be jointly realised*.

Having observed this, I turned again to Marx and Gandhi and observed further that they never made either of these ideals central to their thought. Marx explicitly dismissed liberty and equality as bourgeois ideals. And Gandhi, as is well known, showed a complete indifference to these liberal notions and the codes and institutions that were supposed to enshrine them. I think these sources of the tension between liberty and equality were central to their rejection of both ideals, even if they did not put it in just the way I have. And I believe that they both sought something much more fundamental, much more human, and even ageless, than these ideals of Enlightenment modernity.

What they both sought to make the fundamental and eventual goal of their respective conceptions of revolutionary politics (which were no doubt very different since Gandhi was not a socialist in any obviously recognisable sense) was the overcoming of alienation, or what I call the ideal of an "unalienated life". They both saw the most underlying malaise of modernity to be the alienation that was generated by its tendencies, chief among which were the tendencies of capital. I believe learning these lessons from Gandhi and Marx is a good start in identifying the right and relevant sense of "anti-modern" that I had mentioned.

Can you elaborate on what you mean by the Marxist and Gandhian ideal of the "unalienated life" replacing the modern liberal ideals of liberty and equality?

Yes, sure. This reading of Gandhi and Marx as replacing the ideals of liberty and equality does not mean that those ideals are irrelevant. But they cannot be the notions any longer that are found in liberal modernity. Let me try to explain. Put aside Marx and Gandhi, who are the inspirations for this form of critique of modernity, and let us look at this general issue of how to reconfigure our political ideals along these lines. In my writing, I've presented it basically in Kuhnian terms. Thomas Kuhn had said that radical changes in theory (what he called paradigm shifts) do not retain the old concepts and say better things about them. Rather, they change the subject. They re-conceptualise the old concepts in a new framework. It's a meaning-change, not a theory-change. For theory change, the meanings have to be constant. But what happens in radical shifts is that the meanings get revised. So, for instance, "mass" in Einstein's physics does not mean what it means in Newtonian mechanics. Thus, it cannot be counted as an improvement of Newtonian mechanics. It really changes the subject rather than improves the theory on that subject. Exactly that is the proposal with the ideals of liberty and equality. One shouldn't be trying to improve on the theories of the Enlightenment, one should discard those theories as being based on the wrong ("bourgeois", as Marx called them) ideals.

The next question, obviously, is: what would bring about the change in their meanings? And my thought has been that if we remove liberty and equality—riddled with inner tension as they are—from the theoretical centre stage that they have had in European modernity and put on centre stage instead the ideal of an unalienated life, then one can bring liberty and equality back (from the back door, as it were) but no longer as central now, *but only as necessary conditions* for this more fundamental ideal that is on centre stage. The idea is that if this is properly done, there would be a serious chance of removing the inner tension between liberty and equality that was present when they were the central notions.

So, everything turns on what is meant by

“properly done” and much of my recent theoretical exertions have been focussed on that task. The first task, obviously, is to say something about what is meant by “alienation”, so that one can be clear about what one is seeking in seeking the ideal of an unalienated life.

Right at the outset, it should be said that if you take up this dialectic that I’ve set up between these three ideals, “alienation” becomes an ambiguous term. How so?

It’s an interesting fact about alienation that all its most well-known theorists (Rousseau, Marx, Gandhi, Sartre, to name just a few) saw it as a malaise only of modernity. Premodernity had many horrible defects but alienation was not one of them. Even slaves and serfs had a sense of belonging, whatever else they didn’t have. In fact, the introduction of liberty and equality as central ideals in modernity was intended partly to address those defects and deprivations suffered in premodern societies. But now, if in my dialectic liberty and equality are supposed to be necessary conditions for the achievement of the unalienated life, what is meant by “unalienated life” *cannot possibly* be the unalienated life of premodernity since in premodernity it was precisely *un* accompanied by liberty and equality. So, the term is being used ambiguously.

The theoretical task here is quite ambitious—because I’m trying to transform three concepts *at once*. I’m trying to transform the concepts of liberty and equality, as I said at the start, by removing them from the centrality they have had in the modern period and making them merely necessary conditions for the more central ideal of the unalienated life, but now I am also saying that I am trying to transform the notion of an unalienated life from what it was as exemplified in premodernity. So, it is a *triangular* transformation of all three concepts in concert, all at once, that I am seeking.

You are highly influenced personally and intellectually by Noam Chomsky. As a philosopher what is your take on the influence of Chomsky’s theory of language, the universal grammar, and so on?

Only recently, I had to write a long foreword to his book called *What Kind of Creatures Are We*,

in which he elaborates his most current views on linguistics, philosophy, etc., and it would perhaps be best if I just directed you to that Foreword rather than try to spell out my understanding of his remarkable corpus of work in a short while now.

But let me just say one very general thing about his work in this area since there is so much unnecessary controversy about it. There is a lot of criticism of him that quite fails to understand what he means by “language”, and so the criticisms are quite beside the point. Even so thoughtful a philosopher as Charles Taylor is guilty of this in his otherwise very interesting recent book on language.

What one has to keep in mind about Chomsky is that one will never understand what his account of language is unless one is clear about the fact that he takes it to be first and foremost a biological phenomenon, not a social and communicative phenomenon. He starts with the idea that our (human) biology is unique in being the location of, or for, a capacity for language. And it is, as such, that he proceeds to analyse and explain that capacity. As a result, for him, the communicative function of language is quite ancillary. He is not primarily interested in the vocalised language that has a social purpose for human beings and with which words we produce refer to things in the world. He doesn’t have anything against studying those aspects of human life, but he does not think that those things are scientifically about them, you can say very interesting things about them, but they can’t be what the science of language is about. And Chomsky’s work is primarily the work of a scientist of language. He has nothing against other people being interested in other interesting things about language, but what he wants to produce is a scientific account in the way that scientists try to produce explanatory accounts in physics, chemistry, biology . . . So, he is focussed on something relatively limited and he is very modest about these self-consciously imposed limitations. For him, language has a structure that is very close to the structure of thought or cognition and those structures are ultimately biologically grounded, though till we know more about the biological science involved, one has to track them at the cognitive and computational level. Chomsky

cont'd... on page no. 47

Gandhiji and Empowerment of Women

Vibhuti Patel

- *Woman is more fitted than man to make exploration and take bolder action in nonviolence.*
- *There is no occasion for women to consider themselves subordinate or inferior to men.*
- *Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacity.*
- *If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior.*
- *If nonviolence is the law of our being, the future is with women.*
- *Woman, I hold, is the personification of self-sacrifice, but unfortunately today she does not realise what tremendous advantage she has over man.*

These are some of the most famous quotes from Gandhiji's writings and speeches. Gandhiji believed that India's salvation depends on the sacrifice and enlightenment of her women. Any tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, the Great Soul, would be an empty one, if we were to take no cue for our own guidance from his words and from his life, and put his values into practice. For him ideas and ideals had no value if they were not translated into action. He saw men and women as equals, complementing each other. If men and women work together selflessly and sincerely as equals with a faith like Gandhi's, they may indeed realise *Ram Rajya*, the perfect state. Traditionally, woman has been called *abala*. In Sanskrit and many other Indian languages *bala* means strength. *Abala* means one without strength. If by strength we do not mean brutish strength, but strength of character, steadfastness, and endurance, a woman should actually be called *sabala*, strong. Gandhiji's message almost six decades ago at the All India Women's Conference on December 23, 1936 was: "When a woman, whom we call *abala* becomes *sabala*, all those who are helpless will become powerful."

Gandhiji's Idea of Woman as Mother

In his formative years, Mahatma Gandhiji (alia

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi) was influenced by his mother Putlibai who imparted in him a strong sense of personal ethics and compassion that is conveyed in Gandhiji's favourite prayer song by the 15th century religious reformer, Narsinh Mehta (1414–1481), *Vaishnav Jan to tene re kahiye, je pida parayi jane re* (A godlike man is one, who feels another's pain). Gandhi said: "The outstanding impression my mother has left on my memory is that of saintliness. She was deeply religious. She would not think of taking her meals without daily prayer. She would take the hardest of vows and keep them without flinching. Illness was no excuse for relaxing them."

Gandhi married at the age of thirteen to Kasturba. He lost no time in trying to assume the authority of a husband to lord over her life. But Kasturba never acceded to her husband's wishes easily, and Gandhi's autobiography itself furnishes a remarkable testimony to her tenacity and independence of judgement, and the sharp disagreements she came to have with him when, in the first two decades of their marriage, he unreasonably sought to bring her under his control. This same tenacity and courage that Kasturba Gandhi possessed also proved to be the backbone for Mahatma Gandhi's fight for justice, first in South Africa and then in India. She became his active partner and supporter in all his activities. Thus, she was among the first Satyagrahis to stage dharna at Transvaal in South Africa after the colonial government there declared all non-Christian marriages invalid. When both of them came back to India in 1914 to join the freedom struggle here, she was arrested several times while participating in Gandhiji's campaigns. But at the same time, she was content to live in the shadow of her illustrious husband. She had a multifaceted personality. She was a fiercely independent woman, at the same time very simple and gentle. Kasturba became Ba-mother of all of Bapu's extended family and took loving care of them.

Gandhi learnt much from Kasturba and perhaps

even more from his mother. Gandhiji's devotion to women, particularly to women as mother, began with his devotion to his mother and Kasturba. Motherhood became increasingly his model for liberation of India in the sense that a mother, having brought forth a child, selflessly devotes herself to his care till he grows up and becomes independent. Even after children are grown-up, her constant desire is to make herself one with them. Unless we have feeling and devotion for our motherland, many countries will be lying in wait to crush us. He saw no hope for India's emancipation while her womanhood remained un-emancipated. He held men to be largely responsible for the tragedy. In the course of his social reform work, the realisation came to him that if he wanted to reform and purify society of the various evils that had crept into it, he had to cultivate a mother's heart.

He learnt the fundamental aspects of his soul politics from his mother and his wife, but women's influence on him was not limited to his family. When Gandhiji entered the freedom struggle in India in the second decade of the twentieth century, women had begun creating organisations such as All India Women's Council and Bhagini Samaj, though it is also true that they were founded predominantly among the upper-middle class in urban centres. Although many associate the ideals and organisations of the 'new woman' with Gandhi, as Elise Boulding indicates, "well before Gandhi was calling women to practice Satyagraha, the grandmothers, mothers, wives and daughters of the educated classes in India were forming organisations providing education and action-training for other women, in order to re-build an Indian society free from colonial structures."

Influence of Women Public Figures on Gandhiji

Among these other women who influenced Gandhi were Annie Besant, a British militant feminist and a Theosophist, Sarojini Naidu, a trusted co-worker of Gandhiji, Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya, a fiery Satyagrahi, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Pushpaben Mehta. Geraldine Forbes examines the model that Sarojini Naidu developed in her speech as President of the Indian National Congress, a

model with India as the "house", the Indian people as "members of the joint family" and the Indian woman as the "Mother". Naidu, Gandhi, and many other advocates of women's and national liberation agreed wholeheartedly that women and India would advance together to the extent this new familial model for India was adopted by the women and men of India.

Gandhi believed women could do much to transform India at all levels. In a letter written to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur from Wardha on 21 October 1936, he wrote, "If you women would only realise your dignity and privilege, and make full use of it for mankind, you will make it much better than it is. But man has delighted in enslaving you and you have proved willing slaves till the slaves and the slaveholders have become one in the crime of degrading humanity. My special function from childhood, you might say, has been to make women realise their dignity. I was once a slave-holder myself but I proved an unwilling slave and thus opened my eyes to my mission. Her task was finished. Now I am in search of a woman who would realise her mission. Are you that woman, will you be one?"

Gandhi drew millions of women from the lowest strata into the freedom struggle. As he wrote: "I began work among women when I was not even thirty years old. There is not a woman in South Africa who does not know me. But my work was among the poorest. The intellectuals I could not draw . . . you cannot blame me for not having organised the intellectuals among the women. I have not the gift . . . but just as I never fear coldness on the part of the poor when I approach them, I never fear it when I approach poor women. There is invisible bond between them and me." The mass of poor women were those whose dignified *upliftment* he craved. Poor women understood what he was saying because he empathised with them, the language he used immediately touched their hearts. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, echoing this aspect of Gandhiji's personality, stated: "We found in him not a 'Bapu', a wise father, but what is far more precious, a mother, before whose all-embracing and understanding love, all fear and restraint vanish."

Conclusion

Nobody has done as much as Gandhi to bring

out masses of illiterate women from the four walls of their houses. He attracted so many millions of not just literate but illiterate women without the power of state, without the modern information technology and offering in return only sweat, toil, and pain—it was indeed an exceptional feat! Like Midas touch, anybody whom he touched became vibrant and an active soldier of the movement and not a lifeless idol of gold.

Gandhiji taught us that empowerment of women without sharing our material, financial, intellectual resources with the poor women is not possible. Sharing requires sacrifice. In short, this is the Gandhian formula (sharing and sacrifice). To go ahead on the path shown by Gandhiji, many of us will have to change our life style. Women will need to be conscious and aware and realise that they are the builders of the nation and a peaceful world. The aim of women empowerment should not be

just empowering a few women, but should be ‘total emancipation’. We still have miles to go to achieve our cherished goal to empower women.

(Vibhuti Patel is Professor at the Advanced Centre for Women's Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.)

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No man's thought should be made the center of a political action. It should help but not control. Acceptance and rejection are varying forms of blind worship. There are priceless treasures to learn from Gandhi and from Marx, but the learning can only be done when the frame of reference does not derive from an age or person.

- Dr. Lohia

Ram Manohar was very much misunderstood by his contemporaries. Perhaps his ideas were too original to be understood fully while his straight forwardness was unpleasant to many. - Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan



People will surely listen to me, perhaps after I am dead. - Dr. Lohia



Anthropocene Age and Relevance of Tagore and Gandhi

Samar Bagchi

The earth is today facing a critical ecological crisis. A few months back Dr. Sanmatha Nath Ghosh, the socialist leader of West Bengal, arranged a discussion on “21st Century Socialism”. Socialists and Marxists all over the world are today deeply engaged in discussions on the worsening environmental crisis and ecological socialism. Several articles have been published in the famous American Marxist journal *Analytical Monthly Review* on the issue of Marx’s ecological vision. The time has come for humanity to engage in an all out struggle for an eco-socialist society if mankind has to save itself from extinction.

Even 20 years back the word Anthropocene was not known to us. In the Oxford Dictionary Thesaurus, the word has not appeared yet. But the word Anthropocene is now regularly used in environment and social science books and journals. On the geological time scale, the Anthropocene is a proposed epoch dating from the commencement of significant human impact on the Earth's geology and ecosystems. Though the new epoch has no agreed start-date, but one proposal, based on atmospheric evidence, is to fix the start with the Industrial Revolution ca. 1780, that is, with the invention of the steam engine.

The post Industrial Revolution society is the heyday of capitalism. The greed for maximisation of profit set in competition in the production of goods and gluttonous consumerism. During the early days of the Industrial Revolution, in 1800, when an American used to go to the market, he/she had a choice of 300 items in a market space of 150 sq.mt. Today, when an American living in a city having a population of only 0.1 million goes to a market, he/she has a choice of 1 million items in a market space of 1.5 million sq.mt. As Mark Twain said, “Civilisation is a limitless expansion of unnecessary necessities.”

This has brought in an epochal crisis in nature and society. So much so that recently, scientists from the universities of Stanford, Berkeley and Princeton

issued a statement that the Sixth mass extinction is coming and the first species that will go out of the earth will be humans. The Fifth mass extinction occurred 65 million years ago, when Dinosaurs and millions of species became extinct. The late Dr. Frank Fenner, the famous microbiologist of the Australian National University, before his death a few years back, commented that humans will become extinct within 100 years because of consumerism and population growth. Though I agree with the first proposition of Dr. Fenner, I do not agree that population growth is the root cause for today’s environmental crisis. That is because the Third World, where the majority of population of the world lives, does not consume much. It is the consumerism of the small number of the rich of the world living mainly in the developed countries that is responsible for the epochal crisis in nature and society that we are witnessing today.

Ecological Footprint (EFP) is a new concept that has come in ecology. EFP is the space that is required by a person for his/her need for living. The average carrying capacity of the earth is 1.9 ha per person. But the average EFP of USA is 10 ha per person, of Australia 8 ha and Europe 5 ha, while that of Asia and Africa is only 1.4 to 1.5 ha per person. This is the reason why I say that the populous Third World is not responsible for the ongoing collapse of nature and society.

Collapse of nature

Forest and biodiversity of earth are vanishing fast. Every one second of a day, 40 football fields equivalent of forest gets depleted. Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the need for power to produce goods has kept on increasing. At present, the need for power is increasing at the rate of about 2.2% every year. Most of the power today is being produced from fossil fuels. The CO₂ released during the burning of fossil fuels is causing global warming, which in turn is causing

climate change. A recent damning UN Report says that we have only about 12 years left to prevent climate change from wreaking havoc on the world. It also says that an assessment of how we got here lays the blame squarely at the feet of the 1% (that is, the world's billionaires). Hurricanes, increased rainfall and droughts are happening in different places in the world. Sea water level is rising because of global warming, devouring low lying areas. Thermohaline circulation that keeps balance in the temperature around the world has started slowing down. Acidification of oceans, bleaching of coral reefs, ozone depletion, destruction of nitrogen and phosphorus cycle, air and water pollution, aerosol increase in the air, accumulation of hazardous waste, etc. are increasing. Scientists are predicting that there will be no soil left for crops to grow after about 60 years. Deserts are engulfing newer areas. Permafrost in the Arctic is thawing faster than ever, creating the danger of release of millions of tons of CH₄ (methane) trapped underground—methane is 20 times as potent a greenhouse gas as CO₂. Moreover, when Arctic ice melts, Albedo (measure of reflection of sunlight from ice) reduces, the dark waters that replace the ice absorb more heat, thereby increasing global warming.

When we talk of the increase in GDP as a measure of development, we forget to take into account the environmental degradation cost. In 1992, two scientists of the World Bank calculated the environmental degradation cost of India. It was Rs 340 billion, which was 4.5% of the then GDP of India. Following the publication of this report, Delhi's Centre for Science & Environment (that publishes the important environment journal *Down to Earth*) reviewed it and found that many costs of degradation had not been taken into account. Including all these costs, it found the environmental degradation cost of India to be between Rs 500 to 700 billion, which was 7 to 9 percent of the then GDP.

We may not fully feel the lethal impact of the impending environmental collapse but our future generations will, undoubtedly. The rich of the world are primarily responsible for this impending ecological disaster. It is their greed which is leading to the production of unnecessary necessities, for which huge amounts of energy and natural resources

are being consumed, causing the climate crisis.

The twentieth century has seen unparalleled economic growth, with global per capita GDP increasing almost five-fold. Between 1950 and 1990, world's industrial round wood harvesting doubled, water use tripled and oil production increased six fold. As recently as in 1950, the world manufactured one-seventh of the goods that it produces today, and extracted one-third of the minerals. But these average figures hide the underlying reality that most of this growth and increase in production has been cornered by the rich, which has resulted in a widening gap in the distribution of income and resources.

Collapse of society

Society, be it the Third World or First World, is crumbling. We live in the populous Third World. We know our situation. In India, 1% of the richest population cornered 73% of the wealth generated in 2017. During the last 20 years, about 100 to 120 million people entered the workforce. But, only 0.3 million have got jobs. On the other hand, in the last 15 years the wealth of the billionaires has increased 112 times. According to the *World Happiness Report* of 2017 published by the UN that bases its rankings on per capita GDP, social support, healthy life expectancy and freedom to make life choices and trust, India ranks 122 among 155 countries.

But what about the United States, the acme of the First World? In 1989, in the triennial international conference of International Council of Museums held at den Hague in Holland that I attended, the keynote speaker Dr. Neil Postman spoke about American society thus, "We have already organised our society to accommodate every possible technological innovation. We have deliriously, willingly, mindlessly ignored all consequences of our actions and have, because technology seemed to require it, turned our backs on religion, family, children, history and education. As a result, American civilisation is collapsing. Everyone knows this but seems powerless in the face of it. Here is a partial account of our technological dream. By 1995, 85% of our children will live in one parent homes. In our large cities, fewer than 50% of the students graduate from high school. This from the culture

that invented the idea of education for the masses. . . . One fourth of our population—sixty million people—is illiterate. Every year, forty million people change residences and several million have no residences at all, living in the streets and subways. From 1959 to the present, the incidence of violent crime has increased by 11,000 percent. And two out of every ten Americans will spend some part of their life in a mental institution. Our cities are choked with traffic, our water supply is poisoned with lead and medical debris; our rain's acid; our people consume more aspirin per capita than any other population in the world; our infant mortality rate is one of the highest in the Western world and our teenagers are frying their brains with drugs."

Both Rabindranath Tagore and Gandhiji understood that the industrialised urban civilisation will result in collapse of nature and society. In the year of his death in 1941, Tagore wrote the famous essay "Crisis in Civilisation". He wrote, "I had at one time believed that the springs of civilisation would issue out of the heart of Europe. But today when I am about to quit the world that faith has gone bankrupt altogether." In 1940, in a letter to the Bengali poet, Dr. Amiya Chakrabarty, then teaching in USA, Tagore wrote, "Exploiting the brahmin's knowledge, the kshatriya's arms and the shudra's service today's commercially-minded Europe has grown irresistible. But I can see its feet resting on the downward slope—towards extinction." In 1930, at a meeting of villagers in Santiniketan, Tagore said, "I never could imagine that I shall witness so much of distress in different countries of the West. They are not in happiness. There is no doubt that huge loads of goods have been accumulated, but there is deep distress all around. People cannot remain connected to each other in cities. You don't have to go far—in Calcutta, where we live and the place we know, there is no relation between the neighbours, whether in their happiness and sadness, or during some mishappening." Tagore wrote four articles on cooperatives. In 1928, in the article "Rules of Cooperative", Tagore writes, "Socialisation is the heart of the village. This socialisation can never be achieved in a town. One reason for this is that, as town is large, society becomes loose. Another reason is that because of business and other special needs and opportunities, population becomes large.

There people primarily want to satisfy their own essential needs, not of each other. Due to this, even when people are living in the same locality, they don't feel ashamed if they don't know each other. With the complication of our lives this alienation is gradually growing".

The famous English poet T.S. Eliot expresses this alienation thus, "The desert is not remote in southern tropics; The desert is not only around the corner; The desert is squeezed in the tube-train next to you; The desert is in the heart of your brother."

Gandhiji warned about the effects of industrialisation of India. He wrote, "God forbid India should ever take to industrialisation in the manner of the West. The economic imperialism of a single tiny island kingdom [UK] is today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of 30 crore took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts." Tagore in a lecture in China in 1924 said, "We have for over a century been dragged by the prosperous West behind its chariot, choked by the dust, deafened by the noise, humbled by our own helplessness, and overwhelmed by the speed. We agreed to acknowledge that this chariot-drive was progress, and that progress was civilisation. If we ever ventured to ask, 'Progress towards what, and progress for whom', it was considered to be peculiarly and ridiculously oriental to entertain such doubts about the absoluteness of progress. Of late, a voice has come to us bidding us to take count not only of the scientific perfection of the chariot but also of the depth of the ditches lying across its path."

What are these metaphors of 'Chariot' and 'Depth of ditches' of Tagore and 'Locust' of Gandhiji? If an Indian or Chinese attains an EFP like that of an American, then the earth will be stripped 'bare like locusts' in a few decades, as Gandhiji said. Both Gandhiji and Tagore were completely disillusioned by the city and industrial civilisation.

In a letter on 5th October 1945 to Jawaharlal Nehru, Gandhiji wrote, "I am convinced that if India has to attend true freedom and through India the world also, then sooner or later the fact must be recognised that people will have to live in villages, not in towns, in huts, not in palaces. Crores of people will never be able to live at peace with each other in towns and palaces. They will then have no

recourse but to resort to both violence and untruth. . . . You must not imagine that I am envisaging our village life as it is today. The village of my dreams is still in my mind. After all, every man lives in the world of his dreams. My ideal village will contain intelligent human beings. They will not live in dirt and darkness like animals. Men and women will be free and able to hold their own against anyone in the world.” Nehruji replied on 9th October, “It is 38 years since Hind Swaraj was written. The world has completely changed since then, possibly in a wrong direction. . . . You are right in saying that the world, or a large part of it, appears to be bent on committing suicide. That may be an inevitable consequence of an evil seed in civilisation that has grown.” Nehruji writes in his autobiography, “We cannot stop the river of change, or cut ourselves adrift from it, and psychologically, we who have eaten the apple of Eden cannot forget the taste and go back to primitiveness.” So, by eating the apple of the industrial garden after 73 years of our freedom, the hungriest people of the whole world live here in India. Every 3 seconds a child dies of malnutrition. The divide between the rich and poor is rapidly widening; 1% of India’s rich own 60% of the wealth of the country.

Both Rabindranath & Gandhiji not only talked about village reconstruction, but also attempted to actually put their ideas into practice. Tagore started Santiniketan and Sriniketan to begin work in alternative education and village reconstruction. In 1922, in an article on cooperatives, Tagore wrote, “We have to reconstruct our villages to satisfy all our needs. It is necessary to form a zone. If the heads of the zones can organise all works and redress the deficiencies by themselves, only then will the cultivation of self rule become true all over the country. It is necessary to help and inspire the villages to start their own school, cooperative and bank. By this way if the villages become self-reliant and united, only then we will be saved. Our greatest problem is how to reconstruct our village society.” Tagore sent his son, son-in-law and one of his trusted lieutenants Santosh Chandra Majumdar to the USA to learn agriculture and dairy farming, so that they could demonstrate to the local peasants the techniques they had learnt. Tagore worked in many villages around Santiniketan.

Gandhiji said, “The capacity of the Congress to take political power has increased in exact proportion to its ability to achieve success in the constructive effort—that is to me the substance of political power.” Gandhiji believed that revolution could be completed through nation building efforts. Gandhiji influenced the whole of India through his constructive program.

Nature of alternative society

Basing ourselves on the crisis that modern day civilisation has led us into, and its analysis and description of its alternate in the writings of Tagore and Gandhi, we can visualise an alternative nature-friendly society to have the following elements:

- Establish equity in society not only for the present generation but also ensure inter-generational equity by preserving the health of land, soil, water, air, forest, river, ocean, mountains, etc.
- Ensure adequate, healthy and varied food for everybody.
- All food materials have to be organically produced, abandoning chemical and industrial agriculture.
- Abandon urbanisation and establish self-reliant simple living village society. Everybody will live in small ecologically sustainable houses. The houses will be such that the people themselves can make and maintain it. The houses have to be energy efficient. Some houses may have to be broken. But, all broken materials have to be reused.
- Adequate health services have to be introduced.
- Production of all unnecessary materials that everybody cannot use has to be abandoned. If this is done then the need for energy and ores of various kinds will be reduced.
- All old and discarded materials have to be recycled.
- All production has to be through cooperatives. Most of the useable materials have to be locally produced and used. It will reduce the need of transportation of goods from one place to another. It will in turn reduce energy use, need of transport equipment, roads, bridges etc.
- Majority of people have to be engaged in various works in the village. This will reduce the need

for urbanisation.

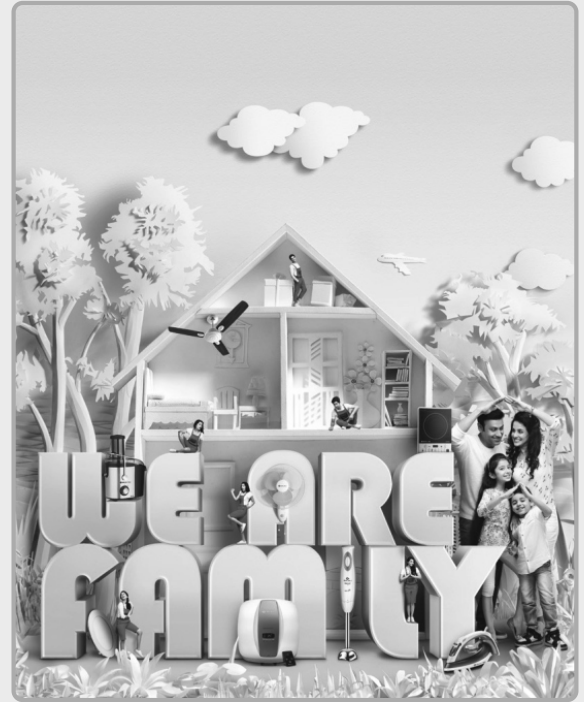
- In such a village-based society where everyone is engaged in productive labour, a new kind of education has to be introduced right from childhood so that people become self-reliant and remain connected with each other.
- Right from childhood a child has to be enthused to a new enriched culture that develops amity between self and others and a feeling of oneness with nature, and that encourages him to shun consumerism and develops in him a desire for simple living. All this will make labour enjoyable, and a part of life.
- Establish gender equality
- Arrange social security for the old and the infirm.

Struggle and construction

The society that is envisaged will not come by itself. To bring it into reality, struggle and constructive work have to be undertaken simultaneously. Uniting all the working people of our country, a relentless struggle has to be started to establish ecological socialism.

Along with the struggle constructive work has to be undertaken by the people in different fields like education, agriculture, village industry, water harvesting, regeneration of forests, etc. In India, constructive work is going on at different places, like that of Timbuktu Collective of Andhra Pradesh, the efforts of Bunker Roy and Tarun Bharat Sangha in Rajasthan and of various Gandhian organisations all over the country. I have myself witnessed and taken part in such constructive works in the country. I firmly believe that we can establish our cherished society. Majority of people of India live a very simple life. It will be difficult for the affluent people to change. Considering that the world is collapsing due to global warming and climate change, I hope that they also will have to change their lifestyle. Otherwise, by Natural Selection they will become extinct. Tagore wrote, "To lose faith in man is a sin." I am an optimist and I am sure that humans will rise up to change the world for better.

(Samar Bagchi is a scientist and former Director, Birla Industrial and Technological Museum, Kolkata. He is famed for his work on taking science to the masses.)



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T.M. Krishna's Ocean of Song

Ashoak Upadhyay

In the evening of the tenth anniversary of 26/11, our own metonym for terror-driven victimhood, against the backdrop of the Gateway of India in Mumbai an Indian Navy band played *Amazing Grace*; its hymnal melody suffused the twilight with bagpipes and oboes providing the syncopated tones of remembrance for those who fell victims to a senseless attack by hate-filled confused youngsters from Pakistan. The band continued with *Abide With Me*; just as the police band before played those immemorial tunes of hope and redemption that have resonated in memorial services across the globe for the innocent felled on killing fields, hymns that seek to lift man from the slough of despair with hopes of reconciliation and redemption. Christian hymns of universal appeal.

These are not 'Hindu' melodies; their universality as balms for distressed souls, music easing animus that leads us to inflict pain on the vulnerable turn them into gentle yet potent reproaches to the petty nationalisms and organised hatreds that had led to the event ten years ago and its remembrance that evening. And what could have more ironical than the enchantment of compassion issuing forth from the branches of forces created to guard that very nationalism and its instrumentalities of the Nation-State?

The repertoire for the evening included artists from almost every community and faith, whether they are believers or not is not the issue; in an age of prejudice where names become markers like beards and the hijab of the 'Other', the profession of religious preferences out aloud alone does not single out one for humiliation or hostility.

Like the hymns played by the Indian Navy and police band the ensemble of artists bore testimony to an Indian republic claiming the privilege of a unity through heterogeneity, of drawing from the waters of universal influences.

And that was what T.M. Krishna also showed at his concert sponsored by the government of Delhi three days after the Airports Authority of India backed off from the heat of the social media trolls

attacking Krishna for being "anti-Indian" and called off the entire show that was to feature other artists like Sonal Mansingh.

One can only hope that those trolls under whose pressure the AAI supposedly buckled were listening to the Indian Navy band and the Mumbai Police Band playing "western" melodies—melodies that have touched the whole world where oppression, genocide and man's cruelty to man and woman and child receive the healing touch through the strains of what can only be described as sacred music.

The event at Gateway of India need not detain us any longer. Theatre, spectacle and performance intertwined with a latent nationalist breast-beating tinged with victimhood; perhaps even a struggle to remember at all that day. After all, our daily churning of endless desires for pleasure and televised spectacle-sports have dimmed those memories, even among politicians and other State actors whose job it is to keep those flames a-flickering. Journalists are the most likely to remember keenly because they hogged the limelight while the befuddled crazed terrorists were holed up inside the Taj Hotel wondering how it would all end.

The concert by Krishna however represents a moment in India's contemporary history of greater significance; it highlights a central problematic concerning the artist and his place in society. Krishna is also a political activist in the broadest sense like many concerned Indians would be civic minded citizens: he has celebrated struggles against environmental destruction, praised the right to privacy and not shied away from discontent at the way political discourse is being conducted by the present government, with polarising dog-whistles. And that gets him the kind of flak many such artists around the globe have attracted for stepping outside what was considered their domain.

I

In Krishna's case that domain is classical, Carnatic music; it is meant to be neutral, value-free

and the artist as its ‘exponent’ has to sing and not a “political tune” at that. Sonal Mansingh, an artist with fifty years of cultural practice behind her took a narrow view of the “cancellation” (*The Indian Express*, November 16), reminding the reader that Krishna was not the only artist rendered stage-less by AAI’s decision to beg off its sponsorship of the November 17 event at Nehru Park, the implication being that far too much was being made of an “eventuality” that can affect any artist. Cryptically, but rather ominously considering her own political standing in the present ruling party that offered her a Rajya Sabha seat, she adds: “I am sure that this was not the first or the last programme of Krishna’s that has been cancelled.” Her complaint against Krishna is underlined by a political statement that Krishna stands opposed to the current dispensation as a representative of the former one. But the most substantive criticism is hurled at Krishna as a fellow artist: art and activism do not blend. And a warning: “Do not use the garb of art to promote politics.”

Four days later, in the *Indian Express*, Dhananjay Singh puts his shoulder to the wheel of the same argument: Krishna mixes politics and art. Singh proclaims his intention to “decode Krishna’s ideological mooring.”

Krishna’s statements over the last few years, Singh tells us, “are entrenched within the binaries of political camps. His artistic expressions and political statements come from two different persons: Krishna the activist is a far cry from Krishna the artist. In art, he expresses beautiful expressions of harmony, in politics, he exploits a sense of prejudice against the Hindus.”

So there we have the “ideological” fix. Krishna is anti-Hindu and is part of the oppositional camp. Singh sees binaries in Krishna’s persona. A gifted artist expressing harmony and a prejudiced activist pitted against the Hindus. The sense of a split personality as an analytical tool continues. Singh finds nothing in Krishna’s art to “affront any point of view”. Hindus would love to hear songs in praise of Jesus, Allah and the like. But, Singh avers, Krishna’s claim that his singing “is a social act beyond the form of the classical and against the Hindu-dominated Indian society is deeply problematic.”

The issues raised above have a two-fold dimension: should an artist be political to the

extent that he / she, in this case Krishna, despoils the “classical” by referencing its purity (in Wilde’s phrasing that Singh quotes approvingly, “useless art”) to the socio-political context in which he lives?

And second, Krishna’s politics is in fact “partisan” (also because as Mansingh complains, it is anti-Modi) and aligned to a political dispensation pitted against the present ruling party. This besmirches his activism or social concerns with an ideological prejudice against the majority community of Hindus.

We should let the artist himself address this question of the place of politics in “culture”, in this case Carnatic music. And perhaps the best place to turn to are his writings. In *Reshaping Art*, Krishna says:

“Social strata restrict the interrelationship between art forms. Art forms do not directly communicate with those below. Influences permeate only if they share spatial commonality. For example, Kattaikkuttu / Terukkuttu (the traditional ritual theatre of Tamil Nadu) practiced by lower and middle castes uses many Carnatic ragas. This is because they shared performance space with Devadasis in the village ritual quarter. But when Carnatic music gravitated to the city of Madras (Chennai) and the Devadasis were dethroned from their high socio-aesthetic pedestal, this osmosis ceased. And this has changed the aural movements of the ragas used in kuttu.”

Here Krishna provides an example of social stratification within the history of that art form, of Carnatic music where the “aural movements” of the ragas are influenced by the social positioning of its practitioners.

Then, a glimpse into his world view:

“Art remains largely constrained by its social sphere of operation. This means that the importance of art is largely dependent on the cultural power of the holding community. In the Indian context, though the upper castes have lost their monopoly over political India, they retain their proprietorship of cultural India.”

For Krishna, culture is not Wildean “useless art”, as a use-less activity of life; culture governs every region of our life. “There is always a predominant culture that dictates our terms of engagement”, not just with the “corpus” of that culture but with

its enactment or performance as well. There are hundreds of versions of the Ramayana, yet the Ramayana of Valmiki, Tulsidas and Kamban hold sway among upper Brahmin castes. And, as he points out, whatever falls “within the aesthetic spectrum” become India’s heritage.

Krishna offers us a glimpse into the practice of Carnatic music as a structure of power relations based on modes of exclusion that work not just as the defining limits of that practice but also as the horizon of a national culture. Valmiki’s Ramayana or Bharat Natyam are peddled as “national” treasures; indigenous or folk and those hundreds of variations of the epic may become junior partners in that enterprise but only at the behest of the gatekeepers of that heritage.

If the “corpus of prescriptions and habits” that provides the “natural ambience” (to quote Roland Barthes) for artistic expression is itself a site for political articulation, what should the artist engaged in that practice do? “The creative act is not pure”, Nadine Gordimer once said. “History evidences it. Ideology demands it. Society exacts it.”

With this understanding of the cultural practice of Carnatic music and his location within it, Krishna fashions his enterprise: to sing and be held *responsible*. That responsibility inflects his art and becomes in the words of Gordimer his “essential gesture as a social being.”

That essential gesture was on display at his Spic Macay concert on June 2017 when he sang Gandhi’s favourite bhajan *Vaishnav jana to* just hours after Amit Shah’s sneering dismissal of Gandhi as a “chatur bania.” His rendition was not use-less art meant to please our aesthetic senses; it was a subliminal yet potent attack on the evil banality of the current regime and a “hate-filled India”, a reminder to us all of Gandhi’s message of empathy and compassion so desperately needed in this unrighteous republic of ours. That rendition was a political act of empowerment.

His concert with the Jogappas, the transgender community, was another example; not a fusion between ‘high’ and ‘low’ music but a confluence, a dialogue between streams of musical traditions, Carnatic and their folk music. Krishna had built the crossroads at which a dialogue was taking place. The exoticised and excluded are engaged in a conversation

on an emergent site of “hybridity.” The process may appear scandalous or revolutionary, depending on attitudes to the ‘pure’ and classical’. But it should be seen like so many other ‘experiments’ of Krishna’s as an expression of his political creed, his essential gesture. It is a responsibility that acknowledges the moral need to return the excluded to the common corpus of his music’s language.

That concert was a political act of empowerment

II

The other side of Krishna’s ‘political’ persona that has attracted attention is his overtly partisan nature. Both Mansingh, herself clearly aligned with the ruling party, and Dhananjay Singh find fault with him for not just embracing an ideology that is “anti-Hindu” (Singh) but for attacking Modi and the BJP in general.

At first blush there is a problem when an artist who embraces universality in his music drapes the flag of a particular political formation or at least is seen to be doing so. And again, there seems to be ground for this sense of disappointment or even rage that an artist of a classical musical ‘heritage’ should stoop to such ‘partisanship’. At best it seems unfair and at worst, hypocritical when all of us know that every political formation is tarred with the same corrupting brush. So the high-minded liberal would say.

Adding grist to this mill was the artist’s acceptance of the Indira Gandhi National Integration Award in October 2017. The party that handed out the award could hardly claim to have been washed in milk as the saying goes when it comes to divisive politics. Yet Krishna set the right tone in his acceptance speech; his epigraph said it all, a statement of his ‘essential gesture’ contextualised: “...there is no one Indian culture—there are Indian cultures—the plurality is the signifier of integration.”

But a whiff of his inclinations is also evident when he praises Manmohan Singh for apologising for the anti-Sikh riots of 1984. A month after his acceptance, I critiqued him for accepting that award:

“This discourse on national integration has been underlined and guaranteed by the political and not the cultural; by the army and not the subalterns; by the flag and an anthem, and not the songs of

communities; and by borders and not diverse memories.

“The Congress as a political formation has not been able to find the golden mean, the dialectical third between a professed commitment to the diversity of communities and religions and languages and its goal of national integration. There is no third; no confluence. But there can be a resolution in which one must trump the other. And national integration wins, or, at the very least, leaves in the wake of its clumsy exercise a trail of ruined heterogeneities.”

And a reading of his speech persuaded me that:

“Soon after a bow to his art Krishna’s acceptance speech achieves an ironic and unintended inversion. The rhetorical as political becomes political as rhetorical. When he talks of national integration, the rhetorical phrasing (with all its clanging emptiness) has a political twang. When he singles out Manmohan Singh’s apology for the 1984 riots to virtually exonerate the ‘leader’ for ‘genocide’ the rhetorical is political. The recipient is recognising the award for what it is: a political act.”

A year later, the criticisms hurled at him for his ‘politics’ made me revisit that speech. Now I see it as a response, a political response to the situation in which Krishna was and continues to be in. The location from which he spoke and continues to speak the way he does is the key to his position. His stances then and now on the state of politics in the country do not reflect partisan bias for the Congress or some other opposition so much as responses to the ideology informing and particularising the current location. And no prizes for guessing what that ideology is in our times when the ugly spectre of majoritarianism is crushing or attempting to crush all the heterogeneities that have made India such a unique country of communities as Tagore thought it to be.

Akeel Bilgrami observed in his talk on Asghar Ali Engineer, that the “locational context” determines responses to its functioning and the way that these responses are viewed. Under the present circumstances when the ‘idoltrous’ worship of nationalism leading to organised hatred sets the discursive tone, any opposition to it will be viewed with disfavour at the very least, or trolled for its anti-Indianness.

And, given the same locational context, it

is entirely feasible that protestations against or critiques of the rigidities inhering in minority faiths and practices will draw approbation and prove popular with the current dispensation.

Location as an ideological discursive space then demonises Krishna’s political utterances that fall within the framework of democratic dissent and are by no means extra-constitutional or ‘partisan’, ‘anti-Hindu’ and by implication, anti-Indian. Given the way the Congress President Rahul Gandhi seems to be veering toward what Sitaram Yechury terms ‘soft-Hindutva’, the maestro-public intellectual may have to re-set his targets should the locational context remain the same after May 2019 even with a soft-Hindutva dispensation beamed out of New Delhi.

In the meantime, the artist’s essential gesture will define his place in the destiny of that corpus of music to which he belongs. His ‘politics’ will be judged in light of that gesture as a social being whose artistic expression contains the vitality of a deep commitment to the universality of not just the musical genre of which he is such a creative exponent but of the country named after a river—Indus, a name the Greeks gave us. “But a river” Tagore wrote in *Creative Unity* “belonging to a country, is not fed by its waters alone . . .” as it flows into the ocean and the vast infinite.

That is perhaps also what Krishna feels with his ocean of song.

(Ashoak Upadhyay is a Ph.d in Economics. He was formerly Associate Editor at the Hindu Business Line and is founder-editor of a web-based feature magazine, thebeacon.in.)

The Unemployment Crisis: Reasons and Solutions

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Kara, Late Com. Jagdish Ajmera, Late Com. Umraomal Purohit, Late Com. Chandrashekar Menon, etc. In memory of late Maniben Kara, WREU established a charitable trust namely "Maniben Kara Foundation" with the objective of lighting against the evils of the society.

Apart from trade union activities, various non-bargaining activities such as organizing Health Check-up Camps, Blood Donation Camps, Family Planning Camps, Anti-Dowry campaigns, HIV-AIDS Awareness Campaigns, Safety Seminars, Trade Union Education Class, Adult Education, Guidance Camp, etc. are conducted for the benefits of the railway men and the general public.

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'Where They Burn Books, They Will Burn Men as Well'

Anjan Basu

It had been a balmy early-summer day in Berlin, but by late afternoon, storm clouds started gathering overhead. As evening fell, a slight drizzle set in, forcing many Berliners to stay indoors. Yet, groups of young women and men—more men than women—started converging on the Opernplatz, one of Berliners' favourite rendezvous that stands by the side of the magnificent Unter den Linden, Berlin's Champs-Elysees. More and more people came, till the plaza swarmed with a crowd of nearly 40,000.

It was not a holiday, but the mood of the crowd seemed festive—in a manner of speaking. There was chanting of slogans, singing of National Socialist songs, notably '*Es zittern die morschen Knochen*' ('The rotten bones are trembling'), and beating of drums even as some young men on the microphone were urging the crowd to clear out from a circular space in the plaza's middle. Lights had come on all around the square and in the noble buildings that ringed it—the State Opera House and behind it the St Hedwig's Cathedral, the Kronprinzenpalais, the Old Palace and the Old Library. Across the road, Humboldt University's main campus still hummed with activity.

Clearly, the stage was being set for a special event right at the heart of central Berlin. It was May 10, 1933. A long and very dark night loomed ahead.

The Nazi students' unions had announced a 'cleansing' drive all around Germany that day, a project for the 'purification' of the German nation's 'soul'. The launch of the grand project had necessarily to happen at the Third Reich's star city, but all around the country, many university towns were also to celebrate the event at the same time.

Late in the evening, Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's minister of propaganda (and after the Fuehrer's death, Germany's Supreme Leader for all of one day) arrived to a tumultuous welcome. The musicians piped up, crackers burst noisily, and the crowd cheered their leader lustily as Goebbels prepared to speak. He spoke as only he could, invoking the 'great German spirit' and calling upon Germany's youth to

rid their great country of all the evils that plagued it—the Jewry, communists, pacifists, 'vagabonds' and homosexuals.

Fiery but short, the speech ended to clenched-fist salutes and noisy 'Heil Hitlers!', and then the evening's centrepiece was unveiled. In the clearing at the square's middle, numerous sacks crammed with books were overturned and their contents tumbled out on to the cobblestones with some help from the ardent purifiers. These were carefully chosen 'un-German' books, 20,000 (25,000, according to some estimates) in number, plundered from public libraries, private bookshelves and academic collections.

The 'honours list' was impressive: Stefan Zweig, Thomas and Heinrich Man, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Rosa Luxemburg, Franz Kafka, Eric Maria Remarque, August Bebel, Bertolt Brecht, Anna Seghers, Klaus Mann, Ernest Hemingway, Heinrich Heine, Upton Sinclair and Eric Kastner huddled together in that insane pile. For good measure, works of Friedrich Engels, Albert Einstein, Maxim Gorky, Victor Hugo, Henri Barbusse and Vladimir Lenin were also tossed in. Then the assembly intoned a solemn, dire pledge: "Against decadence and moral decay! For discipline and decency in the family and the nation! I commit to the flames the writings of . . ."

The bonfire was then lit, and a collective roar the like of which Germany had not heard since the Crusades rent the night air. There were bizarre scenes of jubilation as the tongues of fire, first blue, then greyish orange, and finally devilish red, leapt up towards the sky. Burning and crackling paper seemed to inebriate the crowd like the most potent Bavarian beer. People danced, sang, wept and hugged one another even as thick, billowing smoke swept over them. The scene was surreal. Goya's *Witches' Sabbath*, showing the moonlit silhouette of a giant he-goat towering over a coven of cavorting witches, comes close to capturing the spirit of that evening.

The great anti-war novelist Arnold Zweig, who

happened to watch the proceedings from a distance, noted how “the crowd would have stared as happily into the flames if live humans were burning instead (of books)”. He made up his mind that very night to leave the country. Stephan Zweig fled a few days later, never to return. He killed himself, lonely and heartbroken, in far-away Rio de Janeiro in 1942. Einstein was away lecturing in California, and never again saw the sun rise over Germany. All three were Jewish, and pogroms against Jews had already started in the Reich by then, as Hitler consolidated his power and set about destroying all opposition.

The satirist and celebrated children’s story-teller Erich Kastner was not Jewish, but he also was ‘purged’ that fateful evening, presumably for his well-known pacifist views. In fact, this gentle soul was present at the conflagration when his novel *Fabina* was tossed into the fire. He was recognised, people jeered at him and threw him ugly taunts, but he quietly stood his ground. He continued to live in Berlin through its darkest years, faced every kind of humiliation, was stripped of his position on the Writers’ Guild, but said, memorably:

*I am a German from Dresden in Saxony,
My homeland won't let me go.
I am like a tree that, grown in Germany,
Will likely wither there also.*

Kastner’s home was devastated in allied bombings in 1944, as was his native city, Dresden, somewhat later. After the war, he moved to Munich, probably unable to stand the sight of the ruins to which both Berlin and Dresden had been reduced.

The book-burning carnival was not as roaring a success everywhere as Germany’s purifiers had hoped—not because there was not enough enthusiasm—or enough books to burn—but because rain played spoil-sport that night. In fact, even at Opernplatz the blaze had to be helpfully stoked by spraying gas over the pile—by fire-fighters, of all people—as the drizzle turned into a steady rain. But what mattered was that the message had been broadcast loud and clear: Nazism had conquered not merely political power but Germany’s cultural landscape as well, and one could demur only on pain of death. “(A) master from Germany death comes with eyes that are blue / with a bullet of lead he will hit the mark he will hit you”, in Paul Celan’s

unforgettable words.

Opernplatz today is Bebelplatz, after the great German socialist–internationalist August Bebel (1840–1913), who fought tirelessly both for workers’ rights and against nationalistic jingoism. It now hosts the Book Burning Memorial which, designed by the Israeli artist Micha Ullman, was unveiled in 1995. I had my first glimpse of the memorial on a late November day, when a stiff wind blew in my face and the sun played hide and seek with a high bank of clouds.

It is an unusual memorial and I must confess I did not find it easy to locate. In the middle of the cobble-stone plaza, you get to see a thick plate-glass lid over a yawning void drilled deep into the earth. Once your eyes adjust to the light reflected off the glass cover, you can make out rows upon rows of empty book-shelves standing mutely inside the pit in witness to the carnage of May 10, 1933.

Those shelves were so crafted as to hold 20,000 books or more. And right next to this eloquent nothingness of a sunken, empty library, is a black granite tablet, lying face up, which reads, in white letterings in German, this:

*That was but a prelude; where they burn
books, they will ultimately burn men as well.*

The quote is from Heine’s tragedy *Almansor*, written in 1821. Heine, a Jew, figured prominently on the list of the ‘un-Germanic’ writers whose works were consigned to Nazi flames on that summer night. A more stunning prognosis of a catastrophe is hard to come by in all of recorded history. Hitler and his hordes are dead and gone, but Heinrich Heine stands tall still, right in the middle of the civilised world, to warn us all against the evils of bigotry and obscurantism.

It is three years since I looked into the abyss that Hitler’s young foot-soldiers had dug into the heart of Heine’s (and Goethe’s, and Beethoven’s) Germany. Sadly in these three years, Heine’s warning has assumed even greater urgency across the world. In Germany, as in Austria, Italy, the Netherlands and France—not to speak of Hungary, Poland and other former members of the now-defunct Red Block—hyper-nationalism and crass isolationism have in large measure managed to push the few surviving relics of the Enlightenment against the wall. Sabre-

rattling is no longer the sole preserve of serving army generals, as Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu have shown us. Putin's Russia has relapsed into authoritarianism and religious orthodoxy. Every variety of fanaticism, of intolerance is at a premium, and the world of man seems to be hurtling towards barbarism at frightening speed.

And in India, we may very well be on the edge of a precipice. The rallying cry of the Hindutva brigades, who enjoy the ruling establishment's covert, even overt, support seems to echo the sinister slogans raised by the Nazi student agitators in 1933: "The state has been conquered, but not yet the universities. The intellectual paramilitary is coming in. Raise your flag!"

Over the past many years (and especially during the last four), the state has been encroaching upon academia and the world of culture, indeed upon every institution of democracy, relentlessly, remorselessly. Books have been banned, even burned, movie halls vandalised, and the media has painted itself into a corner, to cover there pitifully. The most disheartening aspect of this tragedy has been the fact that the country's youth has been made the principal engine of coercion everywhere—be it

in cow vigilantism, moral policing or strident anti-liberalism on university campuses.

With a shudder, one recognises the uncanny resemblances between our young, social media-savvy saffron hit-men who throng the WhatsApp universe, and the Nazi militants bristling with hate that night in Berlin. Erich Kastner remembers how he "stood in front of the university, wedged between students in SA (Brownshirts') uniforms, in the prime of their lives, and saw our books fly into the quivering fire".

Perhaps our home-grown Fascists have devised an even more ingenious method of destroying books: by re-writing them wholesale. And that macabre project is targeted at the potential book-burners of our unhappy country—India's young. It is only by being aware of mankind's collective past that we can hope to turn India away from the disastrous path on which Hitler's Indian admirers have firmly set their sights. Our young women and men need to learn this lesson, and learn it well and fast.

(Anjan Basu is a Bangalore-based literary critic, commentator and translator.)

cont'd... from page no. 30

was one of the two or three people who founded the subject of cognitive science. Even evolutionary accounts of language will get things wrong if they don't identify the phenotype correctly in this way. We need an evolutionary account of a biological capacity, not of how we gradually came to develop the sophisticated communicative skills that we have.

I am just pointing all this out because I think the incessant critiques of Chomsky by anthropologists and sociologists of language (and many others) are just off beam. They are talking about a notion of language that he is not talking about at all. (I still remember hearing—as a graduate student—a quite brilliant anthropologist at the University of Chicago giving a shrill, almost hysterical dithyramb against Chomsky one day, and remember coming away from it thinking, "Is he talking about the same person that I've been reading in my theoretical linguistics class?") They are just ships passing Chomsky by at night while pretending that they are engaging with him.

(Akeel Bilgrami is an Indian philosopher of international eminence and scholarship. He currently holds the Sidney Morgenbesser Chair in Philosophy at Columbia University.)

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From Colony to Republic: The Indian Transition

Salil Misra

The 26th of January, India's Republic Day, has a great symbolic significance. But it would be truly unfortunate if this significance is seen only in symbolic terms. This day should be remembered as a reminder of a great transition in India's long history. This was a transition of India from a British colony to a Republic.

This transition was connected to the transformation of an old civilisation into a modern nation-state. This was also connected to the transition of the world from agrarian to industrial. Most of mankind lived in the agrarian state for thousands of years. It looked as if they were destined to remain trapped in the constraints imposed by the agrarian stage. And then a miracle occurred towards the end of the 18th century in some pockets of North-West Europe. A big technological-scientific breakthrough occurred which ushered in the industrial stage. Many philosophers of those times believed that the industrial revolution had provided the 'key' to unlimited human progress, affluence and happiness. A better future began to be seen not as a distant dream but a manifest destiny, well within the human grasp. Moreover this began to be seen as applicable to all the people and societies. This was called the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment philosophers believed that under modern conditions, the traditional inequalities, belonging to dark ages, would be replaced by modern equality. This however turned out to be a very simplistic optimism. In reality what happened was that the traditional inequalities were replaced, not by modern equality, but by modern inequalities. The dynamic system of industrialism produced affluence but also imperialism and colonialism, under which large parts of the world (countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America) came under the political domination of a small number of countries of West Europe. This modern domination, unlike traditional forms of domination, was systematic, orderly and comprehensive. And it encompassed all aspects of life – economic, social and political. Large

and old civilisations of the old world—Indic, Islamic and Chinese—all came under the comprehensive domination of a handful of Western countries. Modernity that brought progress and prosperity to Europe, brought modern slavery to countries of Asia and Africa. The intellectuals and other leaders of these societies began to have doubts regarding the bliss of modernity: Was it a key to progress or a charter of slavery?

It certainly was painful for an old civilisation like India to come under the domination of a small European country like England. Many 19th century writers from Bankim Chandra Chatterjee to Vivekanand lamented this loss of freedom.

The British started conquering parts of India since the 18th century and by mid-19th century almost all of India had come under their control. The colonial rule lasted for two centuries. It impacted not just Indian economy but also polity and society. British colonialism dug such deep roots in the Indian society that it was not easy to remove the traces of colonialism from Indian life after India became free in 1947. At the time of independence the most important task therefore was to rid India of the legacy of colonialism. This really was the crux of the Indian transition from a Colony to a Republic.

What exactly was the legacy of British colonialism? Economy was certainly one area where this legacy was most conspicuous. The 18th–19th centuries was the time when the European countries took a leap and surged ahead of the rest of the world. This was also the time when the economy became the major index of a society's progress and advance. Sadly for India, at a time when the economy acquired such centrality, Indian economy lost its independence and got colonised. There were some important features of the Indian economy under British colonialism. First, Indian economy got integrated to the British economy in particular and the world economy in general, but in a subordinate and a subservient position. In other words, Indian economy was placed at the service of the British

economy and made to fulfil its needs both in the realm of trade and capital. Second, a peculiar international division of labour was forced upon India. India had traditionally been an exporter of cotton textiles. Till the 18th century nearly 20% of the world demand of cotton textiles was met by India. India was the world's biggest exporter of cotton textiles. Under the new economic arrangements, India became an importer of cotton textiles. India now exported food stuffs and raw materials—cotton, jute, oil seeds and minerals—and imported manufactured products from the British industries. Third, given the colonial nature of Indian economy, modernisation happened without development. Even though all the features of modern economy—railway, transport and communication—were introduced in India, it did not lead to any significant development of the Indian economy. This happened because the surplus produced by the Indian economy was 'siphoned off' to England. As a result, India remained a large country with a small economy. The size of the economy remained small. This happened because, under colonial conditions, Indian economy was modernised and underdeveloped at the same time. According to a leading economist, what happened to Indian economy under British colonialism was neither stagnation nor development, but rather the "development of underdevelopment."

The impact of British colonialism was not confined only to the economy but extended to all spheres of life. The education policy of the British introduced modern education, but in such a way that it completely displaced the traditional Indian educational system. English came to be established as the lingua franca of the intelligentsia. But it created a new divide in the country between the English knowing elite and the rest. To a large extent, the divide persists even today.

It is true that the colonial state was a modern state and introduced a modern polity in India. But it also encouraged traditional categories of religion and caste in the Indian politics. Many British thinkers believed that the Indian people were unfit for democracy and should be ruled through some kind of 'benevolent despotism'. They also felt that Indian society and people could never be welded into a modern nation. The initiative for both democracy and nationhood, in fact, came from the Indian

nationalist leaders.

Such was the cumulative impact of the British rule that, when they left India in 1947, they left behind a country that was poor, backward and ridden with exploitative relationships in the economy. The life expectancy of an average Indian was 32 years only. The literacy rate was round 14%. Food availability was very low. During the 2nd World War in 1943, a famine in Bengal claimed around three million lives. It was in this context that Rabindranath Tagore wrote in 1941, a few months before his death: "The wheels of fate will some day compel the English to give up their Indian empire. But what kind of India will they leave behind, what stark misery? When the steam of their centuries' administration runs dry at last, what a waste of mud and filth will they leave behind them?"

They certainly did leave behind plenty of 'mud and filth'. It was this baggage of 'mud and filth' that Indian leadership had to deal with, when India became free. Overcoming the constraints imposed by two centuries of colonial rule was not going to be easy. But it was the most important single factor, if India had to make a successful transition from a Colony to a Republic. Mere independence from the British was not enough. British had gone, but they had left behind a huge cumulative baggage of two centuries. How did independent India attempt to get rid of this baggage?

The Indian response was to initiate a Revolution, during the period 1947–52. This period needs to be recognised as the period of the making of the Indian Revolution. This Indian Revolution was not based on a single episode but was built around five axes. All the five axes were connected to one another and constituted the core of the Indian Revolution.

First of course was the removal of colonialism. It was clear that British colonialism was the biggest obstacle in the path of India's transformation. The removal of colonialism was a necessary, though not a sufficient, condition for India's transformation. This was done with the help of a powerful national movement, led by Mahatma Gandhi, in which millions of people participated in a struggle that stretched for many decades. The Indian national movement was easily the biggest political movement in the history of the modern world.

The second axis of the Indian Revolution was the

integration of princely states into the Indian Union. The British had created a dual political structure in India, under which 2/3rd of the territory and 60% of the people were governed directly by the British. The remaining 1/3rd of the territory and 40% of the people were ruled 'indirectly' by the British, through nearly 565 princely states. These princely states derived their legitimacy from a treaty signed between them and the British. This implied that after the end of the British rule, these princely states, in principle, could declare themselves to be independent. Some of these princely states, such as Jammu and Kashmir, Hyderabad and Baroda, were as large as some of the European countries. Indeed some of the rulers of the princely states did nurture the ambition of becoming independent. Their integration into the Indian Union was necessary for the unity and integrity of the country. This task was accomplished by Sardar Patel. He used diplomacy, pressure, persuasion and sometimes also threats and intimidation to ensure that all the princely states eventually acceded to the Indian Union. By the time India became independent on 15 August 1947, this integration was almost completed and constituted an important axis of the Indian Revolution.

Abolition of landlordism in agriculture was the next major component of the Indian Revolution. The British had created a new class of landlords and other intermediaries in agriculture. This class had been given the ownership rights in land, but was otherwise not very interested in agriculture. These big landlords lived like complete parasites on the land who extracted its resources without giving back anything to agriculture. The real agriculturists—poor peasants—worked like tenants without any stakes in the land. It is therefore not surprising that Indian agriculture remained virtually stagnant and did not experience any growth during the colonial period. For any growth in agriculture, it was necessary to rescue land from the clutches of non-agriculturist landlords and restore it to the real stakeholders—the farmers and cultivators. Immediately after independence, the Indian State moved swiftly in this direction, abolished landlordism, and gave the ownership rights in land to the real cultivators and prepared Indian agriculture for sweeping reforms, both institutional and technological.

The next major component of the Indian

Revolution came with the first general elections held in 1952, based on adult universal franchise. This election—the largest held anywhere in the world till then—gave India the fully justifiable title of being the world's largest democracy. Many Western observers had raised doubts about the wisdom of introducing adult franchise in a country with only 16% literacy. Would it not be better to expose Indian society to democracy only gradually and in an incremental manner, linking it to the rise in literacy? As against this, the thinking of the Indian leaders was that if illiterate masses had the political maturity to fight against, and overthrow, foreign imperialism, they were certainly mature enough to elect their own government. It has to be said that Indian masses have fully lived up to the expectations of their leaders. Indian democracy, with all its imperfections, really thrives on the collective strength of the Indian people.

Undoubtedly the most spectacular component of the Indian Revolution was the introduction of the Indian Constitution on 26 January 1950, truly a peoples' constitution. Indian Constitution was prepared both by the representatives of the people and also by the best constitutional Indian minds of the times. The result was a constitution that was rooted in the Indian realities and yet had transformative potentials. The Indian Constitutional experiment has proved to be durable, unlike that of neighbouring countries like Pakistan and Sri Lanka, where the constitutions were removed and redrafted thrice. There is no doubt that the Indian Constitution has played an important enabling role in carrying out India's transformation and has continued to be a relevant and vibrant document in India's political life, seven decades after it was introduced.

These five, put together, constituted the Indian Revolution. One remarkable feature of this revolution was its largely non-coercive character. Most revolutions in history have entailed a coercive element and have extracted a human cost, on the way to their fulfilment. The Indian Revolution was remarkable in that it was overwhelmingly consensual. In particular, the big landlords and the princes had to pay a heavy cost of the Indian Revolution. But neither of them had to be coerced into giving up their power and legal rights. The Indian Revolution derived its essence from the

values of consensus and accommodation, rather than coercion and displacement. The values of consensus and accommodation had deep roots in Indian traditions. This really was the strength of the Indian Revolution. It sought to draw on the positive features of Indian traditions as a major resource to be utilised for India's transformation into a modern society. It thus attempted to connect India's past with her future. It is this legacy that is exemplified by the Republic Day. This is the essence of the big Indian dream.

Where does that dream stand today seven decades later? If the leaders of the freedom struggle were to visit India of the 21st century, they would certainly feel distraught and let down. Poverty reduction has been slower than anticipated. The social fabric appears more fragile than before. Politically the country is more turbulent and violent than before. There is an air of intolerance in the air. Communalism and casteism, instead of diminishing, have become more resurgent and aggressive. All the major values championed by the freedom struggle and enshrined in the Constitution are under siege. As a nation, we are politically unstable, ideologically hysterical, socially turbulent and economically precarious. We arouse neither admiration nor envy in the world. The great Indian experiment does not appear to be working. Something very basic seems to have gone wrong.

Indian society is rapidly industrialising. But this industrialisation is different from that undertaken during the initial decades after independence, is taking frame under an ideological frame known as neoliberalism. The axial question is: during this transition, what is the social cost that is going to be paid by the Indian people and society? How much of the innate and intrinsic India would remain intact? This is the mother of all questions and all those who truly love India must surely ponder over it. At the heart of this question is the very 'Idea of India' articulated so eloquently by Tagore, Gandhi and Nehru. How much of this 'Idea' would survive in the process of India's transformation?

What is this 'Idea of India' which may be considered the very DNA of the Indian society? One of its most important constituents is the idea of pluralism and diversity. The big subterranean ideational contest in India appears to be between

'monism' and 'pluralism'. To get it right, plurality or diversity is part of India's historical tradition. It has not been created or invented by any ideology or vision. It is simply there. The question is: what to do with it? Both monists and pluralists tend to look at this diversity differently. Monists want this existing diversity to be dominated by one religion, or language, or culture, or whatever. Clearly domination, discrimination and exclusion are inherent in this vision. It can also lead to conflict (given that those who are discriminated against, will resist domination, which will lead to friction and conflict, also violence). The pluralists tend to uphold and celebrate this diversity. They look upon India's plurality not as a liability or an embarrassment, but as a strength and want to preserve and promote it. This then is the big debate on the 'Idea of India', with two principal contestants. This is the big dichotomy.

The leaders involved in the making of our Constitution were fully committed to diversity and the vision of a plural India. That was the great Indian dream. It does appear that the big dream is currently under siege. One can only hope that the siege is temporary and of an episodic nature.

(Salil Misra is professor of history at Ambedkar University, Delhi and is presently Pro Vice-Chancellor of the University.)

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100 Years of Amnesia

Darryl Accone

It was meant to be the war to end all wars, another of those grandiose and foolish human notions. World War I, often dubbed the Great War, formally ended at 11am on 11 November 1918, though fighting on the far eastern front, in Russia, dragged on.

If there was greatness in the slaughter of 20 million soldiers and civilians, it lay in the sheer magnitude of the dead, and in countless acts of nobility, sacrifice and bravery, most unrecorded, if not unremembered. “Never again” was the cry that rang through Europe and the world after the guns grew silent, the troops returned home, and peace began scrabbling its way up from the bloodied earth of Europe.

Yet, here we are again, a scant 100 years later, faced with many of the same preconditions for continental and global conflict that saw the war of 1914 begin. Populist demagogues hold the reins of government in powerful nations with key strategic interests in Europe and the Middle East, from Erdogan in Ankara to Putin in Moscow. The United States is even more isolationist than it was in 1914, but with a vital difference: its leader is very keen to be numbered among those US presidents who have waged war and won.

Spoiling for a fight with new bogeyman China, Donald Trump embarks on a mutually destructive trade war, which is like the real thing without the shooting. Meanwhile, a series of skirmishes and little wars are waged by his administration against people who aren't white Anglo-Saxon Protestants: migrants, non-capitalists, intellectuals, pacifists, conservationists, indeed anyone who lacks the radical reactionary beliefs of those enraptured by the so-called Rapture and the coming great war that will see Us (the Trumpites) beat Them (everyone else).

Bugles calling them from sad shires

“Was it for this the clay grew tall?” asks Wilfred Owen in *Futility*, one of the greatest of the poems written by the war poets, that small group who

fought, and mostly died, between 1914 and 1918. Owen was killed in action on 4 November 1918, exactly a week before the war ended. He was 25.

In a ceremony this month to mark the centenary of Owen's death, some of his poems were read at his graveside and the bugle that he had sent home, taken from a fallen enemy soldier, was played. It called to mind a line from his *Anthem for Doomed Youth*: “And bugles calling for them from sad shires”—“them” being the doomed and fallen youth.

That poem begins, viscerally:

*What passing bells for those who die as cattle?
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.*

(Orisons being an archaic and literary word for “prayers”.)

Bugles are summoned again in *1914*, Rupert Brooke's set of five short poems.

*Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead!
There's none of these so lonely and poor of old,
But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold.
These laid the world away; poured out the red
Sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be
Of work and joy, and that unhop'd serene,
That men call age; and those who would have
been,
Their sons, they gave, their immortality.*

(The first stanza from *III. The Dead*.)

Is it all going to happen again?

Brooke died at 28 in 1915, a sub-lieutenant in the Royal Navy, during the campaign against Istanbul. He is buried on the Greek island of Skyros. In my first edition of his *1914 & Other Poems* there is a poignant inscription, in pencil, by a previous owner of the book. It reads: “RBA / August 1915 / Ypres”. Ypres was one of the bloodiest chapters of the war, and one can reasonably surmise that RBA died there

and was remembered by a loved one or a friend in that pencilled memoriam.

It was a survivor of the carnage, Siegfried Sassoon (1886–1967), who most conveyed the horror. In *Aftermath*, he writes:

*Do you remember the rats; and the stench
Of corpses rotting in front of the front-line
trench –
And dawn coming, dirty-white, and chill with a
hopeless rain?
Do you ever stop and ask, 'Is it all going to
happen again?'*

Three sections of the poem, italicised in the original, remind the hearer of what they dare not forget:

Have you forgotten yet? ...

*But the past is just the same, – and War's a
bloody game ...*

Have you forgotten yet? ...

*Look down, and swear by the slain of the War
that you'll never forget.*

Have you forgotten yet? ...

*Look up, and swear by the green of the Spring
that you'll never forget.*

And yet, we have forgotten, doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past.

(Darryl Accone is books editor of the Mail & Guardian, a South African weekly newspaper, and director of the annual M&G Literary Festival.)



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The Means Exist to Break the Chains of Capitalism

John Bellamy Foster interviewed by *BirGün Daily*, Istanbul

BirGün: We are in the 10th year of the crisis that started from the USA. How do you summarise the consequences of the crisis after ten years?

John Bellamy Foster: The Great Financial Crisis (or Global Financial Crisis) that began in the United States in 2007 and then spread to the global economy after the collapse of Lehman Brothers in September 2008 was obviously a turning point for the capitalist world economy. The deepening of economic stagnation tendencies and the financialisation of the economy as a structural response to stagnation had been going on for decades in the United States and in the other advanced capitalist economies—as famously described by Harry Magdoff and Paul M. Sweezy in *Stagnation and the Financial Explosion* in the mid-1980s. But it was not until the 2008 crisis that the full dimensions and consequences of this were fully apparent. This is a problem that I addressed in two books, *The Great Financial Crisis* (2009), written with Fred Magdoff, and *The Endless Crisis* (2012), co-authored with Robert W. McChesney. The contradictions of accumulation under monopoly–finance capital that were described at that time—growing monopolisation, economic stagnation, and the financialisation of the world economy—have continued to develop over the last decade.

What has grown apace with all of these developments is the new economic imperialism of the global labor arbitrage, involving the location of an increasing share of the world’s industrial employment in the low-wage global South, and the siphoning off of the resulting economic surplus generated through the agency of multinational capital and international financial capital. What we are seeing is a huge amassing of wealth at the center of the system, the headquarters of world finance, which also controls the means of technological and military power, and the terms of trade, while the

largest share of world industrial employment and proletarianisation has shifted to the periphery.

At present the US and the world economy are at the end of a long, sluggish recovery from the Great Financial Crisis. In the United States and elsewhere the economy is at the peak of the business cycle. But this comes at the end of a long, sluggish upturn. Growth rates at the center of the system have remained low, generally below the historical average, throughout the recovery. The US economy currently has a moderate growth rate of over 3 percent but in the European Union it is still below 2 percent. This points to the continuing sclerosis of capital formation. More and more, the capitalist entities in the center are dependent on their imperial financial positions, as centers for the concentration of wealth and power, even in the context of stagnant domestic production and accumulation. Global inequality has thus reached record levels, with a handful of individuals—no more than you could count on the fingers of your two hands, and perhaps fewer—now owning as much wealth as half the world’s population.

Global debt has risen like a mushroom cloud. According to the Institute of International Finance (IIF) in a report that came out this year, the global debt ratio has risen to \$247 trillion, or 318 percent of global GDP. Boosted by the low interest rates following the Great Financial Crisis, world debt has risen 40 percent over the last decade.

All of this has the vested interests deeply concerned. Stock market jitters are now visible, and a full-scale panic is just below the surface. Right now, a downward turn in the business cycle is to be expected. Interest rates are again being eased upward in the United States, in a ghostly replay of 2006–07. The Federal Reserve is trying to initiate a controlled slowdown of the economy, throwing people out of work, in order to keep wages down and to lessen inflation worries—without inducing a financial meltdown in the process.

The IIF, meanwhile, has been raising concerns about emerging economies that are thought to be unable to roll over their debt. The IIF has singled out Turkey, South Africa, Brazil and Argentina as the emerging economies that have become bad risks. These countries, which only a few years ago were being celebrated by international capital as newly emerging centers of global accumulation, are now to be subjected to a new shock doctrine, in order to ensure the continuing flows of wealth to the global North. It is no accident, therefore, that each of these countries is now experiencing major political–economic instability.

One of the major developments in the aftermath of the crisis is the radical right-wing movements, which are represented by Trump in the US, while also developing in different forms in countries from Europe to Asia to Latin America. You oppose the designation of these as populist movements and state that they should be considered as neo-fascist. What is the difference between populism and neo-fascism?

The theoretical critique of classical fascism was developed mainly by Marxist theorists. Figures as varied as Leon Trotsky and Franz Neumann, the author of *Behemoth*, agreed that fascism had its roots in an alliance between the lower-middle class (or petty bourgeoisie) and monopoly capital, under conditions of hegemonic struggle between capitalist states, and growing militarism and racism. It is the nature of this class alliance between the lower-middle class and the upper echelons of concentrated capital that mainly distinguishes fascism, plus its profound enmity to the liberal–democratic state. It arises historically at a time in which the left has suffered major defeats, but when there is also a kind of political stalemate and the right cannot further its ends within the current structure. The enemies of classical fascism are not only the bulk of the working class but also the upper middle class, particularly the more highly educated portion of the population and governmental elites. Fascism invariably employs nationalist–racist ideology and severe repression against its class enemies, and singles out various scapegoats. It relies on what the Nazis called a

totalitarian-state model (not to be confused with Cold War notion of totalitarianism), by which they meant the concentration of power within the state and ultimately the fascist leader (the *Führer* principle), eliminating the separation of powers. As Paul Sweezy said, the antonym of fascism is not socialism, but bourgeois democracy. In Germany especially, this was coupled with the privatisation of the economy (the term privatisation was introduced by the Nazis in the 1930s in the context of their selling off of state property to big business).

Fascism also typically depended on the growth of militant fascist movements (black shirts and brown shirts) that were incorporated into the state as a kind of paramilitary force. Once in power, fascist movements seek to transform the main institutions of the state and civil society by a process of *Gleichschaltung* (bringing into line)—a line of attack more easily carried out because it is backed by the capitalist class, because it takes place within existing institutional structures, and because it relies of what the Nazi theorist Carl Schmitt called the “extermination of heterogeneity,” which privileges some even as it terrorises others. Fascism in power seeks to curb any residual “radicalism” among its lower-middle class adherents while still mobilising them on nationalistic–racist lines. All of this seems to be forgotten, even on the left, and decades of liberal watering down of the notion of fascism have reduced the notion to one of right-wing racism, thereby disguising the structural reality, and the full extent of the danger, which cannot be seen simply in idealist or ideological terms. All of this and more is explained in my book *Trump in the White House*.

Although there is no complete replication of classical fascism in our time, the Trump phenomenon in the United States is best understood as a species of the fascist genus. The core of Trump’s support lies in the lower-middle class (petty bourgeoisie) in the United States, consisting largely of individuals who are white and either self-employed or high-level corporate workers and lower managers, often with strong nationalist and religious identifications. Trump lost when it came to the voters with less than the median level of income, vast numbers of whom, however, did not vote. His ideology and political practice rely on a combination of nationalism,

racism and chauvinism that appeals to the lower-middle class—what C. Wright Mills called the “rear guard” of the capitalist system. Neo-fascism in this sense is a powerful political current, and once awakened won’t easily go away. In the United States it is closely correlated with widespread fears of the decline of US hegemony. Many of those within this social orbit believe that there has been a “betrayal” of the country by liberals, government employees, people of color, immigrants and women, and that this somehow accounts for the economic plight of “middle America.”

The term “populism,” as promoted today by the corporate media, is mostly a distraction, aimed at preventing class analysis and avoiding crucial questions about the class structure of society. It is heavily employed by the liberal media to indicate mass political developments aimed at vague “elites” in which neither the forces at the top or the bottom of society are clearly defined. In the populist rhetoric as used by the establishment populism, whether of left or the right, fascism is seen as constituting a threat to the so-called liberal center.

We are now seeing the spread of semi-fascist movements (not simply authoritarianism) in so-called emerging countries. The best analysis of this global development is still Samir Amin’s “The Return of Fascism to Contemporary Capitalism” in the September 2014 issue of *Monthly Review* where he points to the growth of fascist tendencies in the global South as well as Europe. Modi in India, Duterte in the Philippines, and Bolsonaro now in Brazil are prime examples. As Bernard D’Mello has recently argued in his *India After Naxalbari*, the repressive Hindutva nationalist movement in India is a manifestation of the development of “semi-fascism”—though occurring in a country in which there are still considerable radical opposition forces on the ground.

Turkey is also a developing country and is now facing a crisis, like Argentina. Both are being forced to go to the IMF. How do you assess the crisis in Argentina and the crisis in Turkey?

Both Turkey and Argentina are experiencing severe external debt problems that are also threatening their currencies, and generating

political–economic instability. They are viewed by global capital as representing “roll-over risks.” High external short-term borrowing by these countries over the previous decade, in which international capital played the role of drug pushers, has now placed these countries in a near-default situation given the rise in interest rates introduced by the United States. The symptoms of this economic malaise are a slowdown in their growth, increasing current-account deficits, out-of-control inflation, weakening currencies, and emerging trade wars.

Both Argentina and Turkey have made some tentative efforts to hold down interest rates, but international finance has responded by backing away from their currencies. Nearly all of the major so-called emerging economies (excepting China and economies within its economic sphere of influence and Russia with its oil) are now reeling in the face of these new international pressures. The IMF’s answer is that that these states need to make their populations pay the cost of repaying loans by cutting state spending, social services, electricity subsidies—slashing anything geared to the needs of the population.

Turkey is in a somewhat different position than other emerging economies, in that the bulk of the external debt is held by Turkish companies and financial institutions, not the government. Over half of its \$220 billion in foreign debt is denominated in foreign currencies, which means when the Turkish lira drops the Turkish companies see their debt explode.

One of the developments that need to be evaluated after the 2008 crisis was the wave of opposition, which was shaped by the square movements. This wave of opposition, however, lacked the ability to produce lasting results. At some points, it came to power as in the Syriza experience, in other places it has continued as a horizontal social movement. However, none of these political movements have yet become a center that will change the direction of the process. How do you evaluate the experiences of these movements?

Such movements are the material proof of peoples’ desire to fight back. At the same time,

they represent the organisational, strategic, and ideological weaknesses of the left following a series of massive defeats, associated with the dismantling of the Soviet-type economies and the betrayals of social democracy. In response to neoliberal austerity, which only became worse after 2008, amorphous, left-populist movements emerged in some countries that represented the anger and desires of the people. This was exemplified by the “squares movements.” But since such movements essentially avoided class-based organisation and anti-capitalist strategies, and promoted a vague, anti-elitist ideology, while trusting in a few politically indeterminate leaders as representatives of the entire movement, their successes when they came to power was practically nil, evaporating overnight. Some post-Marxists like Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe promoted such a left-populist view, the dangers of which were highlighted by Ellen Meiksins Wood in *The Retreat from Class*.

Capitalism is a system of power, it can't be materially overcome much less deposed by a mere aggregation of individuals coming together in a square or through the simple exercise of a popular vote. There has to be a more developed left political organisation/strategy. Today it is a question of building a movement toward socialism that struggles for the diverse needs of the working class. The struggle is both horizontal, accommodating the diverse needs of the workers and building equality within, and vertical, confronting a hierarchical capitalist order.

Today, in the wave of opposition, there is a search for new directions from Sanders to Corbyn. Latin America offered one of the first experiences in this respect from Lula to Chávez. What do these experiences say about the progress of socialism in the 21st century?

All of these new developments remind us that class struggle is possible and the various chains that hold us can be broken, and yet they also point to the scale of the problem and the deep contradictions that must be faced. As Marx said, human beings make their history, but not under conditions entirely of their own choosing, but rather under conditions directly inherited from the past.

Sanders demonstrated that a direct appeal to the broad working class in the United States would have an effect. His successes have inspired a broader political movement that has already secured the nominations of a couple of Democratic Socialists on the Democratic ticket for the Congressional elections. But the Democratic Party remains a party of the ruling class, while the United States remains at the center of the imperialist world system. Sanders in his bid for the nomination avoided challenging US militarism and imperialism. This means that the Sanders movement is likely to be very limited from the start in terms of effecting real change.

In this regard, Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party in the UK couldn't be more different. He has been a consistent opponent of imperialism throughout his political career and has not budged on this as party leader. His rise to leader of the Labour Party in Britain therefore represents a historic shift at the level of political ideology and practice.

Lula is certainly no socialist. Tragically, he is now in prison as a result of a right-wing political coup, with the almost certain electoral triumph a few days from now of the outright fascist Bolsonaro. This represents the long-term failure of the whole strategy of the Workers' Party, which tried to accommodate itself to the imperialist system and put its trust in an enlightened capitalist class.

It is to Chávez of course that we owe the notion of a ‘Socialism for the Twenty-First Century’, and it is through the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela that we saw another way of waging revolution, which achieved a significant success in its early years in shifting power toward the people, and in its defiance of international capital, with the result that the revolution has endured despite Chávez's death and the relentless pounding by the US-led imperial order. It is a model of revolution that has relied on the forging of a new constitution, coupled with Bolivarian circles, communal councils, communes, and other forms of popular political-community organisation, in an effort to institute people's power or protagonism. (It has been less successful in the area of promoting socialist-oriented unions and the transformation of workplace relations.) What is astonishing and entirely admirable in this context is the degree of resistance of the Venezuelan

people, who so far have fought a US-directed global counterrevolution at every step, and with the odds stacked against them. Nothing so clearly points to the authenticity of the Venezuelan revolutionary experience. I wrote an article addressing some of the political aspects of this, called “Chávez and the Communal State,” for the April 2015 issue of *Monthly Review*.

For the opposition movement, there is a distinction between the development of the party organisations on the one hand and the horizontal organisations (social movements, assembly type public organisations) on the other hand. How do you evaluate this debate? How can opposition movements move to more effective policy and organisation?

I don't have any magic answer on this, since organisational forms must vary according to circumstances. Organisational initiatives in both horizontal and vertical directions (vertical because of the class struggle waged from below against a hierarchal and repressive system) is necessary. Political parties are essential in any movement toward socialism, but they are not the only possible form of organisation. Socialist parties cannot simply be electoral parties. Extraparliamentary struggle aimed at strengthening the power of the working-class, as well as all struggles of women, race and ethnic groups, LBGTQ, Earth-System defenders, and many others, are vital. All of these movements must be part of the class struggle or the class struggle is meaningless, devoid of real content. By the same token, social movements structurally divorced from the class struggle end up dividing rather than uniting the movement, even when pursuing crucial ends. There needs to be the constant building of the working-class movement on the community level. Class and community (which often means forging wider links between diverse communities) are a powerful combination, and lead to the forging of powerful alliances. Strong, grassroots-based union movements seeking to control the labor process and workplace are essential. Combatting imperialism is another, even bigger challenge. This has to be extended to defending oppressed populations generally wherever they are, including immigrants

and refugees. The major revolutions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have arisen in the global South and these demand our utmost support. The creation of a New International for the twenty-first century is required. Above all we need the audacity to launch continual attacks on the laws of motion of capitalism, using all the ingenuity at our disposal, refusing to “play the game” and forging new strategic terrains outside those laws of motion.

Along with your investigations into the economic crisis, you are conducting in-depth studies on the destructiveness of the ecological crisis. How will humanity save itself from the ecological crisis at a point where the social and economic crisis is deepening.

We normally see economic crises and ecological crises as separate and requiring opposite solutions, freeing up or limiting the economy, respectively. Nevertheless, both have their source in different ways in the capital accumulation process. It should not surprise us that capitalism displays both internal contradictions and contradictions with its external environment, both of which are insuperable. The notion that economy and environment are completely divided off from each other is merely a product of the combined alienation of nature and labor that constitutes the capitalist system. What is certain is that the overwhelming character of the ecological crisis, which today knows no bounds, will eventually override all of this, and workers will find, much like in the early Industrial Revolution, that the main material conditions determining their lives are both economic and environmental—and indeed that the latter are more far-reaching. At that point—and we are already seeing some signs of this, particularly in the global South—an environmental working class will emerge, capable of recognising that our material problems have a common cause in the systems of capital accumulation, and that the solution requires the revolutionary reconstitution of society at large aimed at a world of substantive equality and ecological sustainability.

(John Bellamy Foster, professor of sociology at the University of Oregon, is editor of Monthly Review, an independent socialist magazine published monthly in New York City.)



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The Music of Humanity

Dilip Simeon

One of the most famous anti-fascist films is Charles Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, which subjected Hitler's fantasies of global domination to withering satire. Less well-known is his first post-war movie, *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947), about a genial family man who makes a living by marrying and murdering wealthy widows. Upon being caught, this anti-hero says, "Clausewitz said that war is the logical extension of diplomacy; *Monsieur Verdoux* feels that murder is the logical extension of business."

All distinctions notwithstanding, this is where the common trajectories of modern history show themselves. A large segment of our official elites, businessmen, opinion-makers and middle classes are accustomed to the view that some amount of bloodletting is inevitable in politics, a few thousand corpses and sundry riots and 'encounters' are an acceptable cost in return for the fantasy of progress, prosperity and stability. Market fundamentalists decided long ago that untrammelled capitalism is good for humanity. That it is a fantasy does not matter—fantasies are meant to deflect our minds from intolerable reality. State power is now infused in

criminality; with a brazenly partisan media playing drummer-boy, its fascination with petty crime in contrast to its silence on crime in high places. To cite Verdoux again, "It's all business. One murder makes a villain. Millions, a hero. Numbers sanctify." Let's wait and see where our demented arithmetical imagination takes us.

Many people believe that Gandhi needs a rest. He's irrelevant, except as an icon. Is this true? I do not think so. Ahimsa remains crucial, especially when a growing sense of injustice calls for democratic agitation on a continental scale. It also relates to the ecological impact of militarism. His assassin's accusation that Gandhi was emasculating Hinduism and rendering it impotent points to beyond stereotypes on gender and masculinity. As opposed to rampant consumerism, Gandhi's frugal ideals remind us that fostering ceaseless growth with finite resources is like celebrating cancer. His condemnation of the atom bomb and of the urge to use science for destructive purposes resonates with contemporary concerns. His insistence on *shramdaan* and constructive work are a compass for activist energy. His talisman for

public policy—the suggestion that we keep the humblest of individuals in mind—is both ethical and pragmatic. The warning delivered during his last months—that failure to resolve Hindu–Muslim conflict would result in the sub-continent being doomed to condominium status under the great powers—was prophetic. So was his critique of communally defined nationalism, implicit in his opposition to the transfer of population in 1947. His critical engagement with modernity is surely a necessary debate.

Gandhi's mind worked in tandem with his heart and instinct. He had warned that partitioning India would not solve communal problems and that it would lead to catastrophic violence. He also warned that if the decision was taken and the two parties did not act with goodwill and trust, it would lead to a state of permanent animosity and conflict. In the last months of his life he understood his isolation from the Congress as well as from a large part of public sentiment. He said he felt as if he had been thrown into a fire pit, that his heart burned. About those who combined communal hatred with slogans of *Akhand Hindustan*, he remarked: “There is nothing in common between me and those who want me to oppose Pakistan except that we are both opposed to the division of the country. There is a fundamental difference between their opposition and mine. How can love and enmity go together?”

Gandhi derived his lessons from unremarkable things. Rather, he could see extraordinary truths in small events. He was a philosopher of the quotidian. Asked by his imaginary interlocutor (in *Hind Swaraj*) for historical evidence on soul-force or truth-force, Gandhi

replies that the continued existence of human life despite incessant wars was proof enough. It was war and violence that made news, not the everyday love and co-operation that characterised the lives of millions. History did not record everything that happened but rather, “every interruption of the even working of the force of love or of the soul. . . . you cannot expect silver ore in a tin mine.” But he found his silver where he expected it. In 1947, two refugee women came to see him in Delhi. The first, a Hindu, had lost her son and daughter-in-law and was left with her grandchildren. The second was a Muslim who had no family. They were devoted to each other and wanted Gandhi's blessings for their plan to bring up the little ones as joint grandchildren. The Mahatma was deeply moved and saw them as an embodiment of his passion for Hindu–Muslim unity. And he gave an orange to each of the children.

The one stable feature of communal ideology is pessimism. To insist that people of different faiths, despite being neighbours for centuries are incapable of co-existence, is surely the most pessimistic belief there is. A year ago, the Pakistani writer Mobarak Haider wrote of Pakistan's polity: “War is a tragedy but a society at war with itself and everything around, with no objective and no remorse is more than a tragedy; it is a total disaster.” He went on to characterise it as being “in a state of schizophrenia passing into paranoia.” Whether this assessment fits all of us is a matter for self-reflection.

In October 1947, All-India Radio arranged a special broadcast on Gandhi's birthday, and requested him to listen. He declined, saying he preferred rentio (the spinning wheel)

to radio. The hum of the spinning-wheel was sweeter. He heard in it the “still sad music of humanity”. He refused to release his birthday messages from the world over—it felt futile, when the public seemed to have lost faith in non-violence and truth. As we live through January 30 once more, as we replay the mindless rituals, let us think why, far from becoming irrelevant, Gandhi remains so real. It is because he drew meaning from ordinary things, especially those that signified the persistence of friendship and love amidst hatred and violence. That is why his life and message are so much a part of the “still sad music of humanity”. Today we can only hope that the sadness disperses and the music remains.

Goodbye once again, Bapu. Let's hope we learn to deserve you.

Email: dilipsimeon@gmail.com

(Dilip Simeon formerly taught history at Ramjas College in Delhi, and is presently visiting faculty at Ashoka University, Sonapat.)

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Now a Young Ascetic from Kerala Stakes His Life for Ganga

Sandeep Pandey

Professor G.D. Agrawal, formerly of Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur and known as Swami Gyan Swaroop Sanand since 2011, died on 11 October 2018 on the 112th day of his fast, demanding a law for conservation of river Ganga, at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Rishikesh. 40-year-old Sant Gopal Das, inspired by Professor Agrawal, also sat on fast for the same cause two days after Professor Agrawal began his fast, on 24 June 2018 at Badridham temple in Badrinath. He was kept in the Intensive Care Unit of AIIMS, New Delhi after being moved about to different hospitals in Uttarakhand, Chandigarh and New Delhi. On 4 December he was taken to Dehradun from New Delhi and left outside the office of District Magistrate. He got admitted after that to a hospital in Dehradun, but is untraceable since 6 December 2018. Earlier Swami Nigamanand, then 35 years of age, and associated with Matre Sadan in Haridwar, died on the 115th day of his fast in 2011 in a government hospital in Haridwar demanding curbs on mining in Ganga. Matre Sadan claims that he was actually murdered by a mining mafia associated with the then ruling Bhartiya Janata Party in Uttarakhand. 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 the mining mafia in 2003 when 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.

Now 26-year-old Brahmachari Atmabodhanand, who hails from Kerala, is on fast since 24 October as a sequel to Professor Agrawal's fast at Matre Sadan in Haridwar, 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 BJP in power both at Delhi and Dehradun, who had visited him that if anything happened to Swami Sanand, he and his disciples would continue the unfinished task undertaken by Professor Agrawal. Professor Agrawal's was the 59th fast by a saint associated with Matre Sadan and Atmabodhanand's is the 60th. Brahmachari Atmabodhanand dropped out of a Computer Science graduation programme and became a saint at the age of 21 years. He has fasted seven times till now for the sake of Ganga, at least once every year since 2014. In 2017, when he publicly protested against the DM of Haridwar Deepak Rawat—who was patronising illegal sand mining in Ganga—being given an award in the name of Madan Mohan Malviya, he was beaten by the DM and his security personnel in a room behind the stage and put in jail for a day. During his present fast, Atmabodhanand was forcibly admitted to a hospital by the district

administration on 29 November 2018, and when his condition started deteriorating on 1 December he left the hospital against medical advice (known as LAMA in medical parlance). When he was in hospital, Atmabodhanand was told that he was suffering from dengue and his platelet count had dropped to 64,000, but when he got it tested outside, it came out to be 1,01,000.

62-year-old Swami Punyanand of Matre Sadan gave up foodgrains and is on a fruit diet since Atmabodhanand started his fast on 24 October, and has announced his intention to shift to a water diet in the event of Atmabodhanand becoming a casualty.

If the government would have been sincere about cleaning Ganga, at least 4 out of 10 people in the country would have directly benefited, whereas nobody's life is in danger if the proposed grand temple in Ayodhya is not built. In Sabrimala, the BJP is taking the society backwards by obstructing the entry into the temple of women of child bearing age, going against the Supreme Court decision. It would have been better if the RSS–BJP combine, which leaves no opportunity to exploit people's religious sentiments, had given preference to an issue which benefits people rather than promoting a retrogressive agenda.

The Namami Gange programme meant for cleaning Ganga aims at abatement of polluting activities in the river through interception, diversion and treatment of waste water flowing into it through drains.

However, the capacity of Sewage Treatment Plants is woefully short of the volume of sewage being generated and we are nowhere near being able to completely treat the whole sewage. A total of Rs 11,176.81 crore, which is more than half the budget of Namami Gange, has been earmarked for creating a capacity to treat 1,178.75 Million Litres per Day (MLD) of sewage, but the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), responsible for implementation of Namami Gange, estimates total sewage generation to be 2,900 MLD. In all likelihood, by the time NMCG meets its target of sewage treatment, the volume of sewage generated would have gone up by several times. It appears to be an almost hopeless task. The only hope is to let the river clean itself, but that will require letting the river flow naturally, a demand for which Professor G.D. Agrawal fasted and died and something with which Nitin Gadkari doesn't agree. There is a clear conflict between the development agenda of governments and the demand of environmentalists and fasting saints. There is also a view that sewage should not flow into water bodies and must find an alternative disposal.

The hydroelectric projects are undesirable in the Himalayas for two reasons. It has been seen that maximum damage was caused at the sites of hydroelectric projects in the floods of 2013. Moreover, by obstructing the flow of river, dams and barrages on the Ganga take away the unique bactericidal properties of flowing Ganga water which is present in its sediments. In 1965, the Calcutta Port Trust had reported 8.92 milligrams per litre of sediments in Ganga water near the Sundarbans, while in 2016–17 the Department of

Forests reported it to be 5.52 mg/l in high tide and only 4.68 mg/l in low tide (according to scholar Supratim Karmakar from West Bengal). A number of researches and expert committees have opined that modern development of the kind which seeks to build hydroelectric projects is an invitation to disaster and should not be pursued. Had the government not released water from Tehri dam by submerging more people before they could be rehabilitated, there would not have been enough water in Allahabad, now renamed Prayagraj, for people to take a dip in Ganga during the ongoing Kumbh. However, the governments have been surreptitiously promoting the dams and their builders and have ignored the sane opinion which is now resonating in the voice of fasting saints.

Support has been received even from Bangladesh for the struggle to ensure *Aviral* and *Nirmal* Ganga which shows that the issue affects lives of people across India's border too.

The boatfolk community, known as Nishad or Mallah, in Varanasi has been protesting against the introduction of a luxury cruise service on the Ganga, owned by a private company. At stake is a population of about forty thousand whose livelihood depends on the three thousand boats in Ganga at Varanasi. While licences of boatfolk have not been renewed by the Municipal Commissioner, the cruise has obtained permission from the Tourism Department of the Government of India. The leader of the community, Vinod Sahni, is in jail on false charges since May 2018 as he was opposing the traditional exploitation of boatfolk at the hands of middlemen as well

as the new projects being launched by the BJP government which are a threat to the livelihood of the boatfolk. The Nishad community is also demanding the restoration of their traditional rights to cultivate on the banks of the Ganga, which is now being threatened by vested interests. People living all along Ganga whose livelihood depends on it face a similar bleak future.

The BJP's hypocrisy related to Ganga stands exposed now. It is apparent that the saints fasting for Ganga or the boatfolk of Varanasi matter little for it compared to the vested interests of private corporations who gain from commercialisation of Ganga. If it has to choose between its core agenda of Hindutva and profits for corporations, it has made its preference clear.

However, this could spell trouble for BJP. Tulsidas in *Ramcharitmanas* has said that if saints are unhappy in a regime then the king may burn even without fire. BJP's fortunes have taken a sharp dip ever since the saints started fasting in Uttarakhand, also known as *Devbhumi*, or land of God. Maybe it's just coincidence . . .

Email: ashaashram@yahoo.com

(Sandeep Pandey is a social activist, Magsaysay Award recipient, Ph.D. from the University of California, and has taught at several prominent educational institutions in the country.)

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Issue of Contractual Teaching at Delhi University

Prem Singh

The University of Delhi is replete with ad-hoc teachers. It presently employs around five thousand teachers who work in ad-hoc capacity. Year after year, for every academic session, a hire and fire policy is adopted with regard to their employment by the college administration. In this process, an ad-hoc teacher often finds himself / herself being turned into a guest teacher. There have been instances wherein they couldn't even secure a teaching position in the capacity of a guest faculty in a particular session. This situation has continued in the University for the past decade. During this period, some sporadic attempts were made to make the ad-hoc teachers permanent. But the fact that there are still a very large number of ad-hoc teachers in the University goes to show that the effect of such attempts has been very limited. This also leads to an inference that there exists the necessary workload against which such ad-hoc teachers are being appointed.

There are 90 colleges which come under the purview of University of Delhi. These colleges frequently advertise vacancies for the appointment of permanent teachers. Candidates can only apply after paying an application fee, and each college charges a non-refundable fee of Rs 500 for an application per subject. Qualified candidates from Delhi and the rest of the country apply along with the prescribed fee, but very often the interviews are simply not conducted. Some time later, the same vacancies are

re-advertised, the candidates again submit the application form with the fee, again the interviews don't take place, and the cycle continues unendingly.

Like other universities, Delhi University also has in place definite rules and guidelines for the preparation of question papers for the examinations and also of their evaluation. With respect to evaluation, there are rules as to which teacher is eligible for examining the answer sheets of pass course (now program) papers and honours course papers at the undergraduate level. Owing to the declining numbers of permanent teachers in the University of Delhi, the ad-hoc teachers and even guest teachers have been entrusted with the evaluation of all types of answer sheets. However, what is distressing is that no amendments have been made in the rules by the University administration to this effect.

The issue of ad-hoc teachers has become an important matter in Delhi University's teacher politics. The ad-hoc teachers have taken several initiatives to raise their problems before the Delhi University Teachers Association (DUTA), as well as various active organisations operating in the Association. But, neither the DUTA nor the teacher organisations nor the ad-hoc teachers themselves have been able to eliminate ad-hocism. Ad-hoc, guest and unemployed teachers are sustaining themselves on empty assurances. Due to the prevalence of rampant adhocism, there is a complete lack of

coordination between the student, subject and the teacher, and the brunt of this rift is borne the most by the students. All this is taking place in a University which not very long ago was renowned for the quality of its teaching.

The teacher community of Delhi University had been harbouring the hope that one day ad-hocism would end and permanent appointments would be made. But the hopes proved to be futile as the Academic Council of University of Delhi passed the rules pertaining to contractual teaching on 16 January 2019. This is despite the fact that Ordinance XII of Delhi University provides for only permanent, temporary and ad-hoc teachers. A rule of recruiting 10 per cent contract teachers against the permanent places has been made by adding Article E to the Ordinance. All the elected representatives of the Academic Council took strong objections to this decision. Aggrieved by this decision, thousands of teachers led by DUTA marched from Ramlila Maidan to Parliament Street in protest and even faced arrests. The next day, the teachers sat on a protest dharna at Delhi University's main entrance. The heavy deployment of police and paramilitary forces on both the days and the lathi-charge on agitating teachers is indicative of the government's unwillingness to take back the decision.

In addition to the 26 representatives elected from the teachers' community, the Academic Council of Delhi University also has more than 150 ex-officio and

nominated members, including the heads of departments, professors and college principals. The ex-officio and nominated members present in the Academic Council meeting neither protested the decision nor did they deem it fit to even debate the issue. Neither did any discussion take place as to what was the shortcoming in the existing rules because of which a new rule to impose contractual practice in the teaching system of Delhi University was needed. The Vice Chancellor came to the Academic Council meeting with the only intention of getting the rule passed.

Neither the Vice Chancellor nor the professors—principals of the University have given a thought to the question that had they been kept in ad-hoc or contract capacity for decades, would they have attained the positions occupied by them at present? Would they have been able to secure their present plush posts, grants, projects, foreign assignments etc.? The manner in which they have been able to settle their children—would it have been possible for them in the absence of their present conducive circumstances? The way they have been able to secure their post-retirement life by way of provident fund, pension, medical facility, insurance, etc.—would all this have been possible if they had been adhoc or guest faculties for most part of their lives? Even more importantly, if the teachers teaching them had been ad-hoc, contract or guest teachers, would they have been able to gain an in-depth understanding of their subjects which has enabled them to receive academic accolades? It seems the responsibility inherent in the profession of teaching has vanished in the vortex of privatisation.

The New Economic Policies that have been implemented since 1991 in the name of privatisation and liberalisation have impacted all areas of our national life over the past three decades. One consequence has been the continuing privatisation of our education system. The employment of contractual teachers in school, college and university systems is a part of this privatisation drive. The present movements of the teaching

community have not been able to stop and reverse the employment of ad-hoc and contract teachers. They will need to find ways of building more powerful movements, involving both teachers and students as well as the common people, to find enduring solutions against these malpractices.

Email: drpremsingh8@gmail.com
(Dr. Prem Singh teaches Hindi at the University of Delhi.)

The Motivated Murder of India's Statistical System

Jayati Ghosh

The attacks by the Modi government on many of India's institutions have been noted, but the destruction of India's statistical system was not adequately recognised or condemned. That is, not until the latest revelations on how the Government is refusing to release the NSSO's employment survey for 2017–18 led to the resignation of the last two remaining independent Members of the National Statistical Commission.

This attack on official statistics is obviously important, because it denies citizens access to reliable data on what is going on in the economy and assess the government's performance. It is sad, because India had managed to build one of the more impressive statistical systems in the developing world, despite having a large informal economy and many forms of economic activity not captured by conventional measures. And it is counterproductive even for the government, because effective policy making requires proper knowledge of existing conditions and problems.

The list of such transgressions is long, and gets longer daily. The messing up of the new series of GDP data became evident when the much-delayed back series was sought to be manipulated for the pathetic purpose of showing the current government in a better light than the previous one. Various other data are simply withheld or sought to be massaged before official release, from the government's own reports about the status of the Clean Ganga campaign to the actual results of initiatives like the Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan or the Ujjwala Yojana or the rural electrification campaign. Fiscal data cannot be trusted because the central government hides its deficits by shifting expenditure off-budget, pretending to sell some PSUs to other PSUs, or simply not paying its dues to programmes for employment or food security. The National Crime Records Bureau has stopped publishing its reports for the last two years. The RBI is refusing to disclose information on banks that are not complying with regulatory guidelines. Even the data on the

supposedly transparent MNREGA website contains a fudge that hides the extent to which the government is not providing work even when it is formally demanded.

The self-created mess is worst for official data on employment. First the NSSO was made to scrap the quinquennial large labour force survey on the grounds that it would be replaced with Periodic Labour Force Surveys that would provide “real-time data”. The report of the 2017–18 survey is ready and was cleared by the National Statistical Commission, but the government is not releasing it! Similarly, the Labour Bureau’s report on the sixth annual employment–unemployment survey, for 2016–17, has not been publicly released by the government, even though it was supposedly cleared by the minister in charge.

We can only speculate about whether this is because these surveys show stagnation or declines in employment in the recent past, as suggested by independent surveys. In an already dismal employment scenario, demonetisation is widely accepted to have wreaked havoc on India’s informal economy and livelihoods of the poor. Employment does not appear to have recovered since then. Indeed, the large survey conducted by the Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy (CMIE) suggests a steep fall in employment in 2018, of as much as 11 million jobs, mostly those of rural women and overwhelmingly among less educated workers. While these data are still preliminary, the overall picture is gloomy.

But even as they prevent the public release of potentially incriminating statistics, government Ministers claim that there are no reliable official data on employment in the country. Instead, they—and

the Prime Minister himself—seek to generate hype about employment creation on the basis of completely misleading and even laughable indicators.

One such desperate attempt was that of using the payroll registrations under the Employment Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) as indicative of new employment. As the Director of the EPFO himself clarified, this is wrong for several reasons, and does not give an idea of either new employment generation or even the number of formal jobs. It may reflect existing workers getting registered or moving to enterprises that have such registration; many workers have multiple accounts, which have not been merged; workers’ names are not removed once they are registered even if they lose those jobs and no longer contribute; those registered are not necessarily in “formal” employment in any meaningful sense of the term. The volatility in EPFO numbers point to their limited use in gauging employment levels, while many who are registered get no other benefits of “formality”, even minimum wages.

Despite this, in his speech to the Lok Sabha in July 2018, Prime Minister Modi used this problematic indicator to claim millions of new jobs in the economy during his tenure. He also made some wild guesstimates: assume that all newly registered chartered accountant companies each employ 20 people to get 1 lakh new jobs; assume that 60 per cent of all graduating doctors start their own practices and hire 5 people each to get 240,000 more jobs; assume that three-fourths of the new commercial vehicles sold leads to employment of two people per vehicle to get 11.4 lakh workers; assume that 90 per cent of the autorickshaws sold generate new

employment of 3 people for every 2 such vehicles to get 3.4 lakh new jobs! All these various leaps of faith led him to conclude that 10 million jobs were created in one year alone. This is statistics generation on par with the “science” being peddled by some Ministers, of plastic surgery, in vitro fertilisation and interplanetary aircraft existing in ancient India.

In that same speech, Narendra Modi promised to “present before the country all figures regarding employment present in the system, every month.” Yet, leave alone official survey data, even the figures for public employment are not being released. Budget documents suggest that the number of central government employees actually declined by 75,231 during the tenure of the Modi regime, and projected hiring targets have not been met in any year.

This suggests one immediate and obvious remedy for the employment crisis. There are huge vacancies in existing posts across central and state governments—it is estimated that there are around 2.4 million vacant posts in the central government and many multiples of that for the state governments combined. Just filling these vacancies would provide much-needed employment and ensure better public services as well. Indeed, this is one of the demands of the planned march to Parliament of students and youth on 7 February. Expanding regular employment in crucial social services would also have major positive multiplier effects, generating much more employment indirectly.

So instead of hiding or trying to wish away the problem, a responsive government could actually do something about it. The point is to make sure a responsive government is in place.

Democratic Accountability in a Digital Era

Anupam Saraph, Lalit Kathpalia

Digital India

The government has taken onto itself to become a digital republic. Without a digital ID, the Unique Identity (UID) issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), your ability to access government and private services, your entitlements like salaries, pensions and your rights like education, travel and living in your own home have been increasingly denied. Even with the UID your access to these, and more, is subject to digital apps that need to authenticate your biometric or your access to a mobile that was linked to your UID at the time of enrolment. If apps fail because there is no access to internet, power or because your biometric has changed, as all biometrics do, you can be denied every subsidy, benefit, service, entitlement or right till you get yourself a fresh UID. Until the Supreme Court of India read down the Aadhaar Act on September 26, 2018, if your UID was stolen and used by someone in possession of your biometric or mobile to take over your services, entitlements and rights, you had no recourse as section 47 of the Aadhaar Act prohibited the courts from taking cognisance other than if the UIDAI file a complaint. Most importantly, the UIDAI does not run the delivery of subsidies, benefits and services, nor is it in any way accountable for any failures in these processes. Furthermore, the UIDAI does not take any responsibility for any enrolments, identification and authentication, and the consequent entitlements,

rights, programming interfaces and apps that depend on any of these, but simply licenses out these functions to private parties. The UIDAI does not take any responsibility for even a redressal mechanism itself but simply outsources these functions to private parties.

Digital payments is the next frontier. Not convinced that the Reserve Bank of India and its digital payment systems—the National Electronic Fund Transfer (NEFT) or Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS)—are sufficient or even appropriate to facilitate digital money transfers, the government has been pushing apps built with the Aadhaar enabled Payment System (AEPS) and the Universal Payments Interface (UPI) by a non-government private company, the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI). These apps, based on the "open" programming interface (API) called India Stack, developed by "volunteers" from among former UIDAI employees who designed the UID and Fintech companies, anonymise money transfers and destroy the trace of money from transfer order to transferee. This loss of trace is similar to what bankers call money laundering. Payment wallets, like PAYTM, also allow unregulated generation of digital money and enable making of untraceable payments.

Not convinced that government's records can be accessed to query for information about documents like birth certificate, driver's license, election card etc. issued by the

government itself, the citizen is asked to upload the copies of these documents to a digilocker and provide them to organisations asking for them.

Even voting has been undertaken by Electronic Voting Machines that are not capable of issuing receipts to voters, not capable of receiving votes through multiple channels like ballot papers, mobile phones and internet, and that are not capable of leaving an audit trail of all votes being counted for a candidate so as to ensure that no genuine votes were rejected and none that were counted were electronically generated.

The government's incessant obsession for digitisation has become pervasive in government. The digitisation of the government is creating the blind belief that anything digital is automatically accountable and desirable. In such times concerns about democratic accountability become even more pronounced than ever before.

Digital Accountability

Indian democracy gets its meaning from the Preamble to the Constitution of India. The Preamble promises justice, liberty, equality and dignity for the people of India. The erosion of any of these can only be of benefit to private interests and not benefit public interest. We can, therefore, consider that the provision of these serves public interest.

The preamble also promises India to be a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic. The erosion of any of these can only

be detrimental to national interest. We can therefore consider that any protection of these would be in national interest.

We can, therefore, conclude that Indian Democracy can be meaningful only when public interest and national interest are protected and furthered. Therefore, in a digital age too, whether democracy is being upheld or not can be judged by whether public interest and national interest are being served or not.

Protecting the citizens: The public interest argument

The government is not about service delivery, efficiency, becoming digital, becoming paperless, presence-less, or even cashless. It is about upholding public interest. Public interest is upheld when the ideas of justice, liberty, equality and dignity that were promised by the founding fathers of the country are upheld by the government and its institutions. Democratic accountability requires that these principles of public interest are not violated.

Justice is destroyed when the misuse of UID is not distinguishable from the use of the UID. The mere use of a number, or the uncertified, unverified and unaudited biometric data associated with the number, being treated as a proof of presence and affirmation of a transaction leaves no recourse to a person whose UID number or biometric data has been misused to commit fraud. Not only does it fail to establish the presence of a person, it fails to establish identity. The recent notice by the UIDAI to various parties accessing its database for authentication, confirms that such misuse of stored biometrics is not only possible but has happened.

The use of the UID as a proof of transaction by a person is as unjust as calling a person to act as witness against herself, if not worse. Furthermore the Aadhaar Act also prohibited access to justice by way of preventing courts from taking cognisance of injustice except when asked by the UIDAI. Similarly, justice is destroyed when EVMs steal votes meant for one candidate, in favour of another. When digital initiatives destroy justice, they usually also destroy access to justice. Those wronged in these instances cannot approach the courts or have limited means available in order to seek redressal under both the Aadhaar Act and the Representation of People Act.

When a digital program like the UID eliminates the choice of alternate identification documents issued by government agencies, that are responsible to deliver subsidies, benefits and services (for example rations, LPG cylinders, licences to drive vehicles, obtain passports, obtain subsidy, benefits, pensions, salaries and jobs), it not only fails to uphold the promise of liberty, it destroys responsibility of these parties to treat every person equally and deliver. When the EVM becomes the only way a vote may be counted, the right to choice has been destroyed.

When a government or a private service provider creates classes and treats those having or not having an UID differently, it violates the promise of equality. As those with UID get increasingly different processes and procedures for obtaining their LPG cylinder, rations, passports, jobs, filing tax returns, obtaining health benefits on pregnancy, getting compensation as a victim of Bhopal Gas tragedy

or even getting meals for mid-day meals, the government creates two unequal classes in society against the promise of equality to we the people by the Preamble.

When the claim of human rights, entitlements and citizenship is subject to a person's biometric matching in a database, and not to her need for the human rights as enshrined in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, her dignity is violated. When digital initiatives deny the non-digital world, they violate dignity of those with no access, no digital literacy or those who are digitally challenged.

The argument regarding public interest would challenge the non-digital and digital system with questions of justice, equality, liberty and dignity. The digital system will need to demonstrate that it does not undermine the ability of the individual to access and obtain justice. It will need to demonstrate that the right to choice, including the choice to use the digital initiative, is protected by digital initiatives. The digital system will need to demonstrate that it does not create processes that distinguish those using or rejecting the digital initiative. The digital initiative has failed to demonstrate that it does not undermine the dignity of those who opt in or out of the digital initiative.

Protecting the Nation: The national interest argument

National interest is not about economic growth, foreign direct investments, trade, becoming a super-power, digitisation or even technological progress. It is about upholding the sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic nature of the nation by the government and its institutions as was promised by

the founding fathers of the nation.

In order to protect national interest, the State and its institutions must also protect and enhance the promise of remaining a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic. Democratic accountability requires that this promise of national interest is not violated.

The idea of sovereignty is considered to include absolute supremacy over internal affairs within its territory, absolute right to govern its people, and the freedom from external interference in these matters. In a democratic sovereign nation people must have authority over governance, not private parties. Any digital initiatives taken must guarantee all this, must not violate any of these rights.

In practice, by privatising or outsourcing any part of governance, the government compromises its sovereignty.

In the case of the UID number, the UIDAI both privatised as well as outsourced the enrolment in the UID database as well as the authentication of individuals and the generation of beneficiary rolls using e-KYC. The rolls of residents of India and those who are beneficiaries as well as those on the rolls who may be authenticated during a transaction are decided by private and outsourced organisation, no longer by the people of India with authority over governance.

Similarly, in the case of the EVM, the EVM is manufactured by private parties and only assembled in India by Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) and Electronics Corporation of India Limited (ECIL). The government gives up its supremacy over something as important as elections to technology companies and manufacturers both inside and

outside the country.

The Smart Cities Program of the government outsources the powers of the Municipal Body to joint-venture companies who have signed MoUs with various government agencies from different countries and multinational companies. This too surrenders the authority of a democratic government to have supremacy over governance.

As a socialist country, India must ensure the socialist nature of delivery of services. This requires that people must own the delivery of services, not private interests.

As the use of UID is coerced across services, private, outsourced interests determine the delivery of services, not the people of India. Even the move to a cashless economy has been promoted by pushing for use of banking transactions by non-government and non-people owned entities like the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) and PAYTM through instruments that are neither regulated nor auditable by the people of India. The strange promotion of Universal Payments Interface (UPI) and Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AEPS) over the NEFT run by the Reserve Bank of India not only violates the socialist but also the sovereign nature of the banking system.

As a secular nation, digital initiatives must not violate the secular nature of governance. This means that no digital app or initiative must be driven by religious or spiritual considerations. If digital technologies name themselves with religious, spiritual considerations, collect information or undertake religious or spiritual functions they would violate the secular nature of the country.

As a democratic nation, digital

initiatives must ensure they protect democratic norms. This means that no digital initiative must violate social equality. Social equality would be violated if a digital initiative altered the ability of citizens to be equals in making decisions.

The UID number alters the ability of different persons to be equals in decision making as they are not equally treated by the government in their access to justice, liberty, dignity and their demand for equality. The EVM does not give equal ability to citizens to make decisions—it weighs in favour of those with the ability to cast votes through digital booth capture and those with the ability to digitally capture digital vote counting and hijack the elections.

As a republic the digital initiatives must ensure that the supreme power must remain with the people, not any other institutions. This requires that no digital initiative should be able to transfer the power to institutions that do not belong to the people.

The UIDAI has transferred the enrolment and authentication of those who will be granted rights, entitlements and benefits to private parties. The government has transferred the DBT and consolidated Fund of India transfers to a non-government company, the NPCI. The new Goods and Service Tax (GST) will be collected by a non-government private company, the Goods and Service Tax Network (GSTN). All of these digital initiatives erode the republic of India.

The national interest argument will need to challenge the non-digital and the digital system questions of the sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic and republic nature of

the nation. The digital initiative will have to demonstrate as to how it strengthens sovereignty or at least does not worsen it in comparison to the non-digital system. It will need to demonstrate that it does not undermine the socialist nature or the people's ownership of services. It will need to demonstrate that it is free from religious and spiritual influences. It will also need to demonstrate that it does not undermine democracy. The digital initiative will also need to demonstrate that the power of the people for self rule remains undiminished.

Whose role is it to enforce digital accountability in a democratic world?

In September 2018, the Supreme Court of India delivered judgments on over 38 clubbed petitions on digital India, mostly relating to the UID. Paragraph 127 of the judgment of Justice Sikri for himself, the Chief Justice and Justice Khanwilkar frames the 10 issues they considered. Paragraph 100 of the judgment of Justice Bhushan frames 18 issues he considered. Paragraphs C1 and C2 of the judgment of Justice Chandrachud frames the issues he considered. None of the issues framed in the judgment hold accountable the Union of India or the UIDAI or the current implementation of Digital India to protect public interest or national interest as defined in this paper.

The judgment considered "legitimate state interest" and "proportionality" as defined in the Privacy Judgment in the Puttuswamy matter. Paragraph 71 of the Judgment of Justice Kaul in the Privacy Judgment summarises

the test for proportionality and legitimacy:

The concerns expressed on behalf of the petitioners arising from the possibility of the State infringing the right to privacy can be met by the test suggested for limiting the discretion of the State:

- (i) *The action must be sanctioned by law;*
- (ii) *The proposed action must be necessary in a democratic society for a legitimate aim;*
- (iii) *The extent of such interference must be proportionate to the need for such interference;*
- (iv) *There must be procedural guarantees against abuse of such interference.*

'Any sanction of law', however, does not automatically meet the criteria of serving public or national interests as defined in this paper. 'Any action deemed necessary in a democratic society for a legitimate aim' is both vague in defining democratic accountability and unbounded in legitimacy. 'The proportionality of interference' is left to discretion of the adjudicating officer. 'Procedural guarantees against abuse of interference' admits to the possibility of abuse by interference but at the same time fails to prevent interference.

Without a test of the public interest, or ensuring the protection of justice, liberty, equality and dignity of the people, and national interest, or the protection of sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic and republic nature of the nation, there can be no democratic accountability. Not just Digital India, but the legitimacy of every government action should be accountable to

the principle of public interest and national interest.

There is no evidence of the Cabinet Secretary, who is coordinating the executive's drive to use the UID and implement Digital India, having held Digital India accountable to protect public and national interest. The UIDAI also fails to show any evidence of protecting public interest as there is evidence of widespread exclusions, creation of unequal categories and efforts to eliminate choice, and there is also no effort to protect people from injustice. The UIDAI also fails to show any evidence of protecting national interests as evidenced in the destruction of voter lists by including non-citizens, managing of voter preferences by exclusions, the construction of national population registers including non-citizens, the creation of bank accounts without certifying the identity of persons and transferring subsidies to such unverified bank accounts.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information Technology does not have any report indicating whether it has assessed the initiatives of Digital India and held them accountable to serving public interest or national interest. The Parliament has no procedure or criteria to test legislation or demands for grants for their ability to protect public interest or national interest.

The fourth pillar of democracy too has fallen short of giving voice to discussion and debate on the all important idea of democratic accountability or the ideas of public and national interest as a means to hold the government and its actions accountable.

In a democracy, accountability cannot be to institutions but to the

protection of public interest and national interests promised by the Preamble to the Constitution. This responsibility has fallen on the shoulders of Civil Society as the four pillars of democracy have fallen short of their responsibility.

Conclusion

In this paper, we sought to devise tests for democratic accountability. We have proposed subjecting digital and non-digital initiatives to the tests of whether they further public interest and national interest, in order to evaluate their democratic accountability. Using the Preamble to the Constitution of India we have argued that public interest is served when justice, liberty, equality and dignity of the people is protected and enhanced. We have also argued and illustrated how the national interest is served when sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic and republic nature of the nation is protected and furthered. Using examples from the current Digital India initiatives we pointed out that they erode both public interest and national interest. Applying these tests of public interest and national interest, we conclude that the current digital India initiatives do not, therefore, create democratic accountability. Public discourse will need to continuously reiterate the ideas of public and national interest in order to ensure that the institutions that constitute the pillars of our democracy apply the tests of democratic accountability in an increasingly digital world.

Email: anupamsaraph@gmail.com

(Both Anupam Saraph and Lalit Kathpalia are with the Symbiosis Institute of Computer Studies and Research, the latter being the director.)

Statement Against Threat of Imminent Arrest of Prof. Anand Teltumbde

Students, Faculty and Alumni of IIT Kharagpur

We, the undersigned students, faculty, alumni and others from IIT Kharagpur are shocked by the threat of imminent arrest of our ex-colleague, Prof. Anand Teltumbde. This comes in the aftermath of rejection of the appeal he filed at the Supreme Court regarding the baseless FIR lodged against him by the Pune police under the pretext of the Bhima-Koregaon incident. He has currently been granted a period of four weeks for seeking pre-arrest bail from the competent Court.

Details of the charges can be viewed in the following link: <http://bit.ly/chargesonanand>.

Prof. Teltumbde has been known as a renowned management professional and a scholar.

He graduated as a Mechanical Engineer from VNIT Nagpur and pursued a degree in Management from IIM Ahmedabad. He did his doctorate in Cybernetics and has held responsible positions in the corporate sector such as Executive Director of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd. and Managing Director & CEO of Petronet India Ltd. Even while being in the corporate sector, unusually, he published over 20 research papers in prestigious journals.

Later, he was invited to serve as a Professor in IIT Kharagpur, where he taught business management courses for more than five years before joining GIM. Currently, he heads the Big Data Analytics program of GIM and has launched a post-graduation course this year, the first of its kind in the country.

Despite his highly active professional life, he has always been intent on giving back to society. His intellectual contribution encompasses studying of various social issues and publishing of hundreds of articles along with a regular column, "Margin Speak" in the prestigious Economic and Political Weekly. He has authored 26 books which have been well received and widely read in India and abroad by prestigious publishing houses such as Zed books, Routledge, and Penguin Random House. Besides this he has also delivered hundreds of lectures across India and abroad for the past three decades thereby carrying out the role of a public intellectual. Various universities have conferred upon him several laurels, awards and honorary doctorates.

Coming from the poorest of the poor family, Prof. Teltumbde passed through the best institutes in the country with scholastic achievements. Just being an alumnus of hallowed IIM Ahmedabad, he could have easily lived a luxurious life only if he had chosen to ignore social oddities around him. However, with a sense of contributing to better the lives of people, he decided to just make enough to sustain his family at a reasonable living standard and devote time to make intellectual contribution, the only thing possible, towards making the world a little more just. Informed by this instinct, the residue of activism during his school and college days

naturally landed him in organizations like Committee for Protection of Democratic Rights (CPDR) of which he is today the General Secretary and All India Forum for Right to Education (AIFRTE) of which he is a presidium member.

He has selflessly fought against caste-based discrimination and human rights violation of the marginalised. Moreover, he has been vocal about the education sector which is adversely affected by the neoliberal policies adopted by successive governments. By closing down primary schools, severely cutting funds to higher education institutes, encouraging private investments in education, funding private institutes by taxpayers' money, forcing institutes to generate their own funds through fee hikes or corporate funded research etc., the ruling dispensation has continually tried to push forth its monstrous neoliberal agenda of liberalisation and privatisation.

These incidents are not be treated as stray incidents, rather they aim towards dissociating the marginalised masses from the fruits of education. These issues of national concern have been constantly brought to the fore by activists and students under the banner of AIFRTE.

Prof. Anand Teltumbde has been a guiding force behind this nationwide movement to save the education sector in India.

There is not an iota of unlawfulness in either his voluminous writings or selfless activism. Rather, his entire academic career and corporate career of nearly four decades have been without a single blemish and exemplar of the integrity of highest degree. Despite all these, the danger of being arrested

looms large over him. Moreover, as regards the insinuation of his connection with Bhima-Koregaon or Elgar Parishad, he has been a critique of the episode and his criticism has been published in *The Wire* [<https://thewire.in/caste/myth-bhima-koregaon-reinforces-identities-seeks-transcend>].

Under the preposterous charges slapped against him, Dr. Teltumbde can only be arrested under the draconian UAPA which can mean years of incarceration. Even a hardened criminal can get away with his crime with a metered punishment of a year or two, but an innocent person merely because the police, invariably acting at the behest of political bosses, claim that they have evidence against him could be kept for years in jail. The arrest for him is not simply the hardship of prison life, it is keeping him away from his laptop which has been integral with his body, from his library which has been part of his life, half-written manuscripts of books committed to various publishers, his research papers which are in various stages of completion, his students who have staked their future on his professional reputation, his institute that invested so much resources in his name and recently took him on its Board of Governors, and his numerous friends and of course his family—his wife, who, as the granddaughter of Babasaheb Ambedkar hardly bargained for this fate and daughters who are already disturbed not knowing what has been happening to him since August last year.

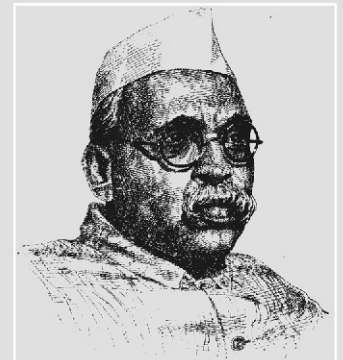
For a person who has devoted almost four decades of his professional life in serving this state apparatus and advocating justice for the marginalised, such

criminalisation is utterly unjust.

With all his intellectual contributions, Prof. Teltumbde has lived his life as an honest truth seeker and has questioned any injustice throughout his life. Whatever criticisms he made, and whatever questions he placed, he has made it with utmost scholastic discipline.

Keeping all his activities and credentials in mind, it is quite unfortunate that a scholar like him is having to face such police actions without any iota of wrongdoing. We stand by Prof. Teltumbde and demand quashing of the baseless FIR against him not only to lend him and his family strength to endure this torture but also to do our part as responsible citizens in protecting the democratic ethos of our country.

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Venezuela: What Activists Need To Know About The US-Led Coup

Kevin Zeese, Margaret Flowers

Two things stand out about the US coup in Venezuela. First, it is unusually open. Typically, the US tries to hide its coups. Second, the coup is built on a series of obvious falsehoods, yet the bi-partisans in Washington, with a few exceptions, keep repeating them.

First, we will correct the falsehoods so readers are all working from the same facts. Second, we will describe how this coup is being defeated. It will be another major embarrassment for the Trump administration and US foreign policy.

It is important to understand that Venezuela has become a geopolitical conflict as Russia and China are closely allied with Venezuela. China and Russia coming into the backyard of the United States challenges the antiquated Monroe Doctrine.

Venezuela has the largest oil reserves in the world and the second largest gold reserves, as well as diamonds and other minerals such as coltan (needed for electronic devices). And, Venezuela is taking over as president of OPEC and will be in a position to push for oil payments in non-dollar currencies or in cryptocurrencies, a major threat to the US dollar.

Correcting the Record

There are a series of false statements repeated by DC officials and corporate media to justify the coup that are so obvious, it is hard to believe they are not intentional. In his two-paragraph comment on the coup, even Senator Bernie Sanders repeated them.

1. Truth: President Nicolás Maduro is the legitimate president.

President Maduro was re-elected on May 20, 2018, in response to the opposition demanding an early election. The legitimacy of the election of Maduro is so evident that it must be assumed those who say he is illegitimate are either intentionally false or ignorant. The election was scheduled consistent with the Venezuelan Constitution and in consultation with opposition parties. When it became evident that the opposition could not win the election, they decided, under pressure from the United States, to boycott the election in order to undermine its legitimacy. The facts are 9,389,056 people voted, 46% of eligible voters. Sixteen parties participated in the election with six candidates competing for the presidency.

The electoral process was observed by more than 150 election observers. This included 14 electoral commissions from eight countries, among them the Council of Electoral Experts of Latin America; two technical electoral missions; and 18 journalists from different parts of the world, among others. According to the international observers, “the elections were very transparent and complied with international parameters and national legislation.”

Venezuela has one of the best electoral systems in the world. Voter fraud is not possible as identification and fingerprints are required for each voter. Voting machines are audited before and immediately after the election. Venezuela does

something no other country in the world does—a public, citizen’s audit of a random sample of 53% of voting machines that is televised. All 18 parties signed the audits.

Maduro won by a wide margin, obtaining 6,248,864 votes, 67.84%; followed by Henri Falcón with 1,927,958, 20.93%; Javier Bertucci with 1,015,895, 10.82%; and Reinaldo Quijada, who obtained 36,246 votes, 0.39% of the total.

This same voting system has been used in elections that Maduro’s party has lost in governor’s and legislative elections. Venezuela is a real democracy with transparent elections. The United States could learn a good deal about real democracy from Venezuela.

2. Truth: The economic crisis is caused by outside intervention, internal sabotage and the decline in oil prices.

There is no doubt the economic situation in Venezuela is dire. The cause is the economic war conducted by the United States, the major decline in oil prices and economic sabotage by the opposition. In essence, the United States and opposition created problems in the Venezuelan economy and now say Maduro must be replaced because of problems they created.

Oil was discovered in Venezuela in the early part of the 20th century and has dominated the economy since then. The Dutch Disease, the negative impact of an economy based on one natural resource, causes a sharp inflow of foreign currency, which raises the value

of the country's currency, making the country's other products less price competitive. It is cheaper to import products rather than create them. This makes it more difficult for segments of the economy like agriculture and manufacturing to develop.

Chavez and later Maduro sought to diversify the economy. They put in place thousands of communes and hundreds of thousands of people working in cooperatives to build agriculture and manufacturing. When the global price of oil was cut by more than half, it collapsed Venezuela's public finances, undermining these efforts. The economic war by the US made it difficult for Venezuela to borrow and trade with some countries.

Economic sanctions against Venezuela began under President Obama, and the Trump administration escalated them with financial sanctions. United States sanctions have cost Venezuela some \$6 billion since August, according to a recent article published at *Venezuela Analysis*. Measures against the nation's oil industry have prohibited the Venezuelan majority-owned company, CITGO, from sending profits back to Venezuela, a \$1 billion loss to the government yearly. Now, the Bank of England is refusing to return \$1.2 billion in gold reserves after US officials, including Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and National Security Adviser John Bolton, lobbied them to cut Venezuela off from its overseas assets.

The US economic war and sabotage of the economy by business interests has been exposed as part of the effort to remove Maduro by creating social unrest and lack of confidence in the government. This

has included hoarding of goods, storing essentials in warehouses and selling Venezuelan goods in Colombia.

In September 2018, Venezuela pointed to a false media campaign exaggerating migration from Venezuela. They highlighted statistics from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to affirm that Venezuela has the fewest volunteer migrants in the continent. They pointed out that 5.6 million Colombians have fled violence in their country and live in Venezuela. Venezuela has programs that have helped thousands of Venezuelans return home.

Socialism strengthens economies, as demonstrated in Portugal. Indeed, one criticism of Venezuela is that the Bolivarian Process is moving too slowly to put in place a socialist economy. There is a need for more sectors to be nationalised and put under democratic control of the people.

3. Truth: The opposition is violent, not the Maduro government.

Opposition protesters have been extremely violent. One tactic of the opposition was to be violent and then film the government's response to make the government look violent. When Abby Martin (an American journalist and presenter, founder of independent media site *Media Roots*) was confronted by opposition protesters, they told her, "Do not film anything that we do. Just film what the government does to us." She reported on the violence saying, "the vast majority has been caused by either indirect or direct violence by the opposition."

Martin reports the opposition attacked hospitals, burned down the Housing Ministry, assassinated

Chavistas and attacked citizen communes such as an art commune that gave free dance and music lessons to local children. Afro-Venezuelans were burned alive. Protesters pulled drivers out of buses and torched the buses. When photos and videos of opposition violence were put on social media, Martin and her colleague, Mike Prysner, became the target of a false media campaign on social media. The opposition did all they could to prevent them from reporting the truth using hundreds of death threats and threats that they would be lynched.

In 2017, *Venezuela Analysis* reported that violent opposition protests included an attack on a maternity hospital endangering the lives of more than 50 newborn babies. Another report described the opposition using snipers to shoot government officials and civilians. Opposition newspapers urged that blunt objects be used to "neutralise" pro-government protesters, resulting in serious injuries and death.

Steve Ellner, writing for the Australia based *Green Left Weekly*, also reported that violence was coming from the opposition. He pointed to attacks at grocery stores, banks, buses, and government buildings. Other commentators described specific incidents of violence by the opposition including killing people. Maduro ordered the arrest of a retired general who tweeted how to use wire to decapitate people on motorcycles, which happened, and how to attack armored vehicles with Molotov cocktails.

Documents show that violence was the opposition's strategy. They sought to "Create situations of crisis in the streets that will facilitate US intervention, as well as NATO

forces, with the support of the Colombian government. Whenever possible, the violence should result in deaths or injuries.”

The tales of government violence are rooted in lies. The government’s response was Maduro calling for a peace conference describing it as “a national peace conference with all the country’s political sectors . . . so we Venezuelans can try to neutralise violent groups.”

4. Truth: The National Assembly acted in violation of the law and is in contempt of court.

The National Assembly is not the only democratic body in Venezuela. Indeed, its actions since the opposition won a majority have violated the law and protected the violence of the opposition with an embarrassing amnesty bill.

On December 6, 2015, the opposition won a parliamentary majority in the Assembly. There were allegations of vote buying in Amazonas state that were investigated by the National Electoral Council, another branch of the government. The Supreme Court barred four legislators from Amazonas taking office, two from the opposition, one allied with the opposition and one from the ruling party. The National Assembly allowed three candidates to take office. The Assembly has been held in contempt of court since July 2016 and its decisions were nullified.

Before the court ruling, the Assembly passed an amazing amnesty law, which granted amnesty for crimes the opposition has committed since 1999 (Chavez’ election). The law is an admission of guilt and provides a well-organised catalog of crimes including felonies, crimes committed at public rallies,

terrorist acts involving explosives and firearms and undermining the economy. They essentially admitted exactly what Chavez/ Maduro have claimed—crimes to overthrow the government for 17 years. Venezuela’s Supreme Court ruled the amnesty law was unconstitutional. Inaccurately, the Trump administration calls the Assembly Venezuela’s only remaining democratic institution.

This January, a subsidiary of the state oil company asked the Assembly to intervene claiming the president cannot make reforms to mixed public–private oil businesses without the prior approval of the National Assembly. On January 16, the court ruled that the Assembly was still in contempt of court and could not act. This is also when the Assembly elected Juan Guaidó as their president, who would later appoint himself President of Venezuela, as part of the US-led coup. Guaidó’s election to head the legislature was illegal and nullified by the court.

The Assembly still exists but remains in a state of contempt of the judiciary. It can rectify the situation by removing the lawmakers accused of electoral fraud. The Assembly refuses to do so because their goal is to remove Maduro from office and they need a super-majority to do so.

A Timeline of the US Coup in Venezuela

In “Anti-Maduro Coalition Grew from Secret Talks,” the *Associated Press* explains the coup was “only possible because of strong support from the Trump administration, which led a chorus of mostly conservative Latin American governments that immediately recognised Guaidó.”

Since August 2017, Donald Trump has been saying that military intervention against Venezuela was a distinct possibility. AP describes this as a “watershed moment” in the coup planning. They report Trump pressuring aides and Latin American countries to invade Venezuela. In September, the *New York Times* reported that the Trump administration had been meeting with coup plotters since mid-2017.

The *Wall Street Journal* reports Trump has long viewed Venezuela as one of his top-three foreign policy priorities, with Iran and North Korea. Trump requested a briefing on Venezuela on his second day in office, talking of the immense potential of Venezuela to become a rich nation through its oil reserves. AP reports that Trump “personally sparked” this as he brought up regime change in Venezuela in every meeting with Latin American leaders.

After Maduro was re-elected, administration plans began taking shape, driven in part by key members in the National Security Council and anti-Maduro advocates in Congress like extreme interventionist Senator Marco Rubio.

On November 1, John Bolton zeroed in on Latin America, calling Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela a “troika of tyranny.” On January 2, Bolton met with his Brazilian and Colombian counterparts to collaborate to “return Venezuela to its democratic heritage.”

On January 10, when Maduro was sworn in for his second term, Pompeo spoke with opposition leader Guaidó, pledging support. Canada also played a key role, AP reports that Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland spoke to Guaidó the night before Maduro’s

inauguration offering Canada's support. This was 13 days before Guaidó announced he was president of Venezuela.

On January 12, the State Department backed Guaidó's move to invoke his authority as president of the assembly, saying, "It is time to begin the orderly transition to a new government." On January 15, the National Assembly declared Maduro as illegitimate. The Trump administration worked to get allies lined up to support Guaidó'. By January 18, the Venezuela Foreign Minister was describing a US coup in progress.

The night before Guaidó's announcement on January 23, Vice President Mike Pence put out a video message encouraging Venezuelans to overthrow their government, saying, "We are with you. We stand with you, and we will stay with you." Guaidó also received a phone call from Pence the night before he appointed himself president where he pledged that the US would back Guaidó.

Guaidó declared that Maduro's government was illegitimate and he was assuming the presidency. In a well-coordinated charade, almost instantly, Trump recognized Guaidó as the country's rightful leader. To further demonstrate the preconceived, tightly coordinated and efficiently carried out the coup, US allies, among them Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Chile, and Peru, quickly recognised the coup president.

The Trump administration is claiming Guaidó represents the lawful government and is entitled to all Venezuelan revenues. The State Department notified the Federal Reserve that Guaidó is the agent for access to Venezuelan assets in

US banks.

Nearly as quickly, Maduro drew statements of support from Russia, China, Turkey, Mexico, Cuba, Bolivia, and others. The Venezuelan Supreme Court called for an investigation into the National Assembly and Guaidó, regarding the illegal usurpation of Executive power. The Venezuelan military announced it supported Maduro and Russia warned the US not to intervene militarily.

On January 25, the Organization of American States, which is traditionally a US tool, rejected a resolution to recognise Guaidó. Medea Benjamin of CODE PINK interrupted Pompeo at the OAS holding a sign that said: "a coup is not a democratic transition!" Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza thanked Benjamin, saying, "With her protest, she revealed the macabre coup plan against Venezuela, we will always prevail, thank you!" Eighteen countries defeated the proposal.

At the UN Security Council meeting on January 26, Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia accused the United States of attempting "to engineer a coup d'état." He demanded to know whether the Trump administration "is ready to use military force" against Venezuela. European countries gave Venezuela eight days to hold an election, a suggestion Venezuela rejected. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called Venezuela an "illegitimate mafia state." He accused Russia and China of trying "to prop up Maduro."

Both China and Russia have told the US not to intervene in Venezuela's internal affairs. In December, Russia sent two nuclear-capable strategic Tu-160 bombers

to Venezuela along with an An-124 heavy military transport plane and an II-62 long-haul plane. As of December, Russia has one brigade in Venezuela and was discussing sending a second military brigade to Venezuela even before the coup due to the continued threat of intervention from the United States.

China has lent over \$50 billion to Venezuela through oil-for-loan agreements over the past decade and has become a partner in the Venezuelan oil industry. In December, seven months since signing a financial business venture with China, Venezuela's oil production has doubled to 130,000 barrels per day. The take-over of Venezuela's oil would also be an attack on China. China and Venezuela signed 28 bilateral strategic cooperation agreements on September 14 in the areas of oil, mining, security, technology, finance, and health.

Demonstrating the nature of the coup president, the first acts that Guaidó took were to seek a loan from the International Monetary Fund, which would put Venezuela in debt to western bankers and under their control, and to privatise the Venezuelan oil industry, which would rob Venezuela of the funds being used to lift up the poor and working class.

The appointment by Mike Pompeo of Elliott Abrams as the person in charge of overseeing operations "to restore democracy in Venezuela" is an ominous sign. It is scandalous and demonstrates the most extreme elements of the US establishment are leading the charge. Abrams was convicted during the Iran-Contra scandal, supported US-backed death squads in Guatemala and El Salvador in

the 1980s, played a key role in the Reagan administration support for the murderous Contras in Nicaragua and was the person who gave approval for the US-backed coup in Venezuela in 2002.

Analyst Vijay Prashad writes the coup violated the charters of the United Nations and of the Organisation of American States and describes efforts to call on the military to rise up against the government have failed. The Trump administration is now threatening a total oil embargo on Venezuela and is leaving the “military option” open.

The concerted campaign by the US and Canada to install Juan Guaidó as the new ‘self-declared’ interim President of Venezuela has been met with initial failure. Unfortunately, the illegal and undemocratic attempts to destabilise the country and overthrow the democratically-elected President will continue with harmful consequences. The people of Venezuela are rising once again to defend their country against hostile foreign intervention. It is essential that we support them in this fight. Many groups are holding solidarity rallies and issuing statements of support.

While Sanders got all the facts wrong about Venezuela, he did reach the right conclusion: “The United States has a long history of inappropriately intervening in Latin American countries. We must not go down that road again.” People in the United States have an important role to play in supporting Venezuela and defeating the coup.

(Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers are directors of the US news website Popular Resistance, and were among the organisers of Occupy Washington DC in 2011.)

Youth March for Climate Justice in Brussels

Chantal Verdonshot

The last few Thursdays, Brussels’ streets have been flooded with students. They carry signs and chant phrases such as ‘climate justice now’. Belgian youth is fed up with a system in which their future is put at risk and politicians make all kinds of promises in order to be elected, while the biggest contributors to climate change go unpunished.

The outrage of youth was sparked when Belgium voted against new EU energy efficiency guidelines after 75,000 people attended a climate march in December. Soon, a movement called ‘Youth for Climate’ emerged, which called for students to skip school and march for climate justice. While its first marches were small, their size has been quickly growing. Today, during the third climate march, approximately 32,000 young people marched.

Luna Bauwens, one of the organisers and forerunners of Youth for Climate explains why it is so important to her to mobilise her peers to march for climate justice. “I really want us to be heard. 75,000 of us marched in December, but it did not make a difference. Our climate ministers did not even show up to the EU meeting about the eco pact. I am very angry at the Belgian government because it does not take any initiative to tackle climate change.”

While climate change does not affect Luna personally yet, she is afraid that it will be a problem

for her future children. “There are solutions, and still, we do not tackle the issue because we are too lazy, or because it will cost money to do so.” She hopes that Belgium’s new government, which will be elected in May, will make tackling climate change a priority and will invest in solutions.

At the same time, she is also afraid that politicians do not take this youth movement seriously. In her experience, adults think they need to explain to young people how things work. They think they can reassure them by showing some data and making some new promises. We will have to wait until after the elections to see whether politicians take youth seriously or not. But if the new government proceeds to neglect climate change policies, Luna predicts that there will be more protests by Youth for Climate.

When asked if the young generation is sufficiently active in politics and activism, Luna says she thinks it is. She is amazed by the fact that 32,000 people marched for the climate today, only because two teenage girls encouraged them to. To her, it seems that more and more young people start to realise that something is wrong with our capitalist system. “It is nice to see that more people realise this. I have faith in our generation.”

(Chantal is from the Netherlands and has a background in human rights, social studies and public health.)

Letter to Editor

Difference Between a Nationalist and a Patriot

Uday Dandavate

The term nationalist has acquired a new meaning in the context of its use (or misuse) in current day politics around the world.

Often nationalism is positioned as a reaction to globalism. Protecting the interests of a nation under attack from international economic, ideological and terrorist forces is often cited as the patriotic duty of citizens.

Appeal of Nationalism is enhanced by stoking the fear of losing sovereignty and security. Nationalism is often promoted by authoritarian leaders / parties who seek to consolidate power by stoking parochialism, majorityism and anti-minorityism. There is always an enemy for those promoting nationalism. Someone has to lose in order for nationalism to win. Nationalism surreptitiously breeds hero worship of a supreme leader and encourages subservience to the authority over expression of dissent. Under the garb of nationalism, state violence is justified as a means to protect sovereignty of a nation.

In a nationalistic atmosphere, the creative class, which often thrives on alternate and often dissenting perspectives, is suppressed and condemned as traitors. Ideologies that encourage the underprivileged to protest and assert their rights are condemned as anti-national. Secularism is damned. And liberal thinkers face mob attack by blind

followers of the nationalistic ideologues. In a nationalistic regime there is no place for multiple perspectives—only one vision prevails.

On the other hand a true patriot is an exact opposite of a nationalist. A patriot recognises his/her duty to contribute to the building of a nation. Towards that goal, he/she is willing to sacrifice, experiment with ideas, challenge authority when powerful people impose a view that is not in the best interests of a free society. A patriot stands up for the downtrodden. A patriot is curious and hungry to create prosperity for his/her people by tapping into the diversity of the world. A patriot's creativity stems from empathy for the pain of the suffering brethren and anger against oppressive establishment. A true patriot is not parochial—he/she thrives in a multi-cultural environment. A true patriot is not subservient to the state. He/she takes democracy seriously and assumes responsibility as a watchdog and acts with courage. He does not hesitate to resist oppression of the state.

The world will be a better place if there were more patriots than nationalists. The world would be more creative and happier if we open our minds and embrace others who are not like us. Our nation will be safer if we build bridges rather than walls.

Email: uday@sonicrim.com

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Gandhi and Communal Harmony

Ram Puniyani

Indian society is going through difficult times. In the name of religion horrific violence is going on. In this violence, innocent people get killed and generally those guilty of violence are not punished. This violence is possible due to the hate which has been created in society, hate against religious minorities. This hate has been created by projecting a pattern of history, communal history, which revolves around the religion of the medieval kings. Contrary to this communal version of history propagated by communal forces, Gandhi has a very rational understanding of Indian history, and because of this understanding, he could talk of peace and unity.

Communal History

Muslim communalists assert that the Muslim Nation has existed in India since the time of Mohammad bin Kasim, who first won over Sindh in 8th Century. The Hindu communalists assert that this has been a Hindu nation since times immemorial, and that Muslims are foreigners. They also talk of atrocities of Muslim kings, and present the fight between Hindu and Muslim kings as battles between Hindus and

Muslims. Gandhi on the contrary disseminates an understanding which is more rational, non-sectarian and all-inclusive. In *Hind Swaraj* he points out,

The Hindus flourished under Moslem sovereigns and Moslems under the Hindu. Each party recognised that mutual fighting was suicidal, and that neither party would abandon its religion by force of arms. Both parties, therefore, decided to live in peace. With the English advent, quarrels recommenced.

... Should we not remember that many Hindus and Mohammedans own the same ancestors and the same blood runs through their veins? Do people become enemies because they change their religion? Is the God of the Mohammedan different from the God of the Hindu? Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads so long as we reach the same goal? Wherein is the cause of quarreling?

Moreover, there are deadly proverbs as between the followers of Siva and those of Vishnu, yet nobody suggests that these two do not belong to the same nation. It is said that the Vedic religion is different from

Jainism, but the followers of the respective faiths are not different nations. The fact is that we have become enslaved and, therefore, quarrel and like to have our quarrels decided by a third party.

This is precisely what the truth of history is. Battles between kings were for power and wealth while the average people interacted with each other and created syncretic traditions and culture. There also developed the religious streams which drew from each other and enriched the society as a whole. What is Indian culture? Is it Hindu? Is it Muslim or what? As such India is one of the few places where all religions have flourished without any discrimination. Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism are the major religions that people have been following in India for centuries. Some of these were born here and others came in and spread through different mechanisms, like the teachings of saints, Sufis, missionaries, etc. Islam mainly spread through the teachings of Sufi saints, and Christianity through missionaries working for charity in the arena of education and health. All aspects of culture had a rich sprinkling from people of different religions.

Perceptions and Reality

The popular perception of identifying communal violence with religion was criticised by the Mahatma. He was clear that religion should not be used for political goals or for violence, “The Hindu thinks that in quarreling with the Mussalman he is benefiting Hinduism, and the Mussalman thinks that in fighting a Hindu he is benefiting Islam. But each is ruining his faith.” (*Young India*, January 27, 1927, p. 31.)

For him the essence of true religion was the moral values of the religion, not the external issues related to rituals and symbols etc. He points out, “The essence of true religious teaching is that one should serve and befriend all. I learnt this in my mother’s lap. You may refuse to call me a Hindu. I know no defense except to quote a line from Iqbal’s famous song: *Majhab nahin sikhata aapas mein bair rakhna*, meaning, religion does not teach us to bear ill-will towards one another. It is easy enough to be friendly to one’s friends. But to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy is the quintessence of true religion.” (*Harijan*, May 11, 1947 p. 146)

Religious Tolerance

His commitment to religious tolerance was infinite. He was for having respect for all human beings irrespective of their caste, colour, creed and religion. To overcome mutual suspicion and hate he was for interaction of communities at all levels, something which is very much needed even today. This is the only way to overcome mutual suspicion, “It is only when the Hindus are inspired with a feeling of pure love . . . that Hindu-Muslim unity can be expected. As with the Hindus so with the Mussalmans. The leaders among the latter should meet together and consider their duty towards the Hindus. When both are inspired by a spirit of sacrifice, when both try to do their duty towards one another instead of pressing their rights, then and then only would the long standing differences between the two communities cease. Each must respect the other’s religion, must refrain from even secretly thinking ill of the other. We must politely dissuade members of both the communities from indulging

in bad language against one another. Only a serious endeavour in this direction can remove the estrangement between us.” (*The Vow of Hindu-Muslim Unity*, April 8, 1919.) This seems to be as true today as it was nearly a century ago, or probably it is needed much more today than at that time.

“India cannot cease to be one nation because people belonging to different religions live in it. The introduction of foreigners does not necessarily destroy the nation; they merge in it. A country is one nation only when such a condition obtains in it. That country must have a faculty for assimilation. India has ever been such a country. In reality there are as many religions as there are individuals; but those who are conscious of the spirit of nationality do not interfere with one another’s religion. If they do, they are not fit to be considered a nation. If the Hindus believe that India should be peopled only by Hindus, they are living in dreamland. The Hindus, the Mahomedans, the Parsis and the Christians who have made India their country are fellow countrymen, and they will have to live in unity, if only for their own interest. In no part of the world are one nationality and one religion synonymous terms; nor has it ever been so in India.” (*Hind Swaraj*)

Tolerance and Diversity

As Gandhi was working in a plural atmosphere with a respect for diversity he could see the need for mutual tolerance in a practical way. Each other’s way of eating, worship and other things which are different have to be respected by the other, “Mutual toleration is a necessity for all time and for all races. We cannot live in peace if the Hindu will not tolerate the

Mohammadan form of worship of God and his manners and customs, or if Mohammedans will be impatient of Hindu idolatry or cow-worship. It is not necessary for toleration that I must approve of what I tolerate. I heartily dislike drinking, meat-eating and smoking, but I tolerate all these in Hindus, Mohammedans and Christians even as I expect them to tolerate my abstinence from all these although they may dislike it. All the quarrels between the Hindus and the Mohammedans have arisen from each wanting to force the other to his view. (*Young India*, February 25, 1920)

He could reconcile faith in religion with Indian nationalism. He gave due respect to a person's religion while ensuring that Indian nationalism is the first identity of that person, "Nationalism is greater than sectarianism. And in that sense, we are Indians first, and Hindus, Mussalmans, Parsis, Christians after." (*Young India*, January 26, 1922)

At the same time Gandhi was clear that religion is a personal matter, not to be brought into the political space. "If religion is allowed to be, as it is, a personal concern and a matter between God and man, there are many dominating common factors between the two which will compel common life and common action. Religions are not for separating men from one another, they are meant to bind them. It is a misfortune that today they are so distorted that they have become a potent cause of strife and mutual slaughter." (*Harijan*, June 8, 1940)

In today's times where so much violence is taking place in the name of religion, Gandhi's teachings on Hindu-Muslim unity can show the path towards a peaceful society.

Why Universal Basic Income is Fraught With Serious Problems

Prabhat Patnaik

With Congress president Rahul Gandhi's announcement recently at Raipur that his party had taken a "historic decision" to introduce an income guarantee scheme for the poor, and with the general anticipation that the Narendra Modi government's last budget will also announce an income support scheme in some form, at least for "farmers", the idea of a "universal basic income" for the Indian population is once more in the air. This idea was mooted two years ago in the Government of India's Economic Survey, though it was meant only for discussion and represented the views not of the government itself but rather of the chief economic advisor of that time who, in turn was giving expression to an old World Bank prescription.

We must start with a distinction. Though the term "universal basic income" is bandied about, the proposals made on the question usually refer to what should more aptly be called a "targeted income top-up scheme", i.e, a scheme where certain segments of the population are given a certain amount of extra income support, on top of what they are already presumed to be earning, in order purportedly to bring them up to a certain minimum level of income. This was true of the *Economic Survey* discussion. And even Rahul Gandhi's phraseology, namely "income guarantee", suggests that he, too, has in mind a targeted income top-up scheme rather than one that actually ensures a basic income for all.

While even this may at first sight appear a welcome move, it is fraught with serious problems. The first question to ask is whether this scheme would be in addition to the subsidies and the welfare schemes already in existence, or whether it would replace such existing welfare expenditures.

Again, most suggestions in this regard visualise a replacement, implicitly if not explicitly, of existing schemes, in which case what appears at first sight as income guarantee would cease to be so in reality. Not only would an income support calculated on the basis of existing prices and price subsidies be obviously inadequate when such subsidies are withdrawn, but even if the calculations do incorporate the effect of the withdrawal of such price-subsidies, they would still be inadequate in the absence of guaranteed *delivery* of goods and services.

The amount of income support, for instance, may be calculated on the assumption that the public distribution system (PDS) would be withdrawn, and that everybody would have to pay the open market price for foodgrains; but income support calculated even on this assumption would still not be enough if foodgrains are not actually delivered to the people. The PDS, in other words, does not just provide subsidised foodgrains to some; it also ensures that foodgrains are actually delivered to many. The withdrawal of PDS would leave people without

assured food delivery, and cash income support would not *per se* bring them adequate foodgrains.

More generally too, the proposition that cash support can substitute for provisioning in kind, that, for instance, a payment to parents to cover the expenses of a child's mid-day meal can adequately replace the mid-day meal scheme itself, is wrong. The mid-day meal scheme serves multiple objectives, not just satisfying hunger but also ensuring proper nutrition, and overcoming social divisions among children. These multiple objectives cannot be fulfilled if parents are simply handed cash to pay for their children's meals. Hence, if the cash income support scheme is to be in lieu of existing welfare schemes, and there is a great danger of this happening for financial reasons, then that would be entirely undesirable. A cash income support, if it is to be meaningful, must be in addition to the existing welfare schemes; and these schemes must also continue to grow alongside such support.

Likewise, income support for "farmers" is often mooted as a substitute for the provision of a minimum support price for crops. This really amounts not to an offer of support to "farmers", but rather to a rolling back of support: it means that the government merely hands out a certain sum of money to "farmers" and then washes its hands of them and leaves them to the mercy of market price fluctuations.

A distinction is often drawn between "merit" and "non-merit" subsidies, and it is suggested that the income support scheme should be financed by cutting down "non-merit" subsidies. But many have estimated that the so-called "non-merit subsidies" have already been so

curtailed that any further curtailment in them would hardly generate much funds, certainly not enough to finance an income support scheme. More importantly, however, even this distinction between merit and non-merit subsidies is problematic.

Consider, for instance, one oft-mentioned non-merit subsidy, namely, the fertiliser subsidy. If the curtailment of fertiliser subsidy increases the cost of production for the peasantry and if this necessitates an increase in the procurement price, and hence the issue price under PDS, then this curtailment, though deemed to have affected only a non-merit subsidy, would hurt the poor. On the other side, if the issue price is not raised and the food subsidy is increased instead, then a cut in one subsidy would have led to an increase in another. Hence, distinguishing between merit and non-merit subsidies and assuming that the latter can be curtailed with impunity is not as valid as appears at first sight.

If an income support is to be given, without cutting existing welfare schemes and subsidies that benefit the poor, then additional taxes have to be raised (unless the government is willing to enforce cuts in some of its non-welfare expenditures, like defence). And if these taxes are not simply to take away from the poor what is given to them as income support, then they would have to take the form of direct taxes (such as income, capital gains, and wealth taxes) rather than of indirect taxes which typically impinge on the poor. Any increase in these direct taxes, however, would be opposed by the big capitalists and by globalised finance capital. Hence, no government that doesn't have the will to defy these powerful entities,

can provide genuine income support to the poor.

It is noteworthy in this context that some of the most enthusiastic supporters of the "Basic Income Scheme" are to be found among the neo-liberal stalwarts of the financial press who hold the interests of the big bourgeoisie dear to their hearts, and among current and former World Bank executives. This suggests that income support is expected to be provided not in addition to the existing welfare schemes but through a replacement of such schemes. Such replacement would not only subvert the goal of poverty alleviation but would also amount to a further disengagement of the State from the task of providing essential goods and services to the population. (At the most it would mean helping the poor not at the expense of the rich but at the expense of the slightly less poor).

Income support, contrary to appearances, therefore, amounts to a further drift in the direction of neo-liberalism, of the State washing its hands of the poor after handing them a certain sum of money whose real value too would dwindle over time.

The theoretical argument for income support usually invokes the proposition that the provision of employment for all has become well-nigh impossible in the current scenario. This, no doubt, is true of neoliberal capitalism, though it is made out to be a proposition of universal validity, irrespective of the mode of production. But let us for the moment accept this proposition as true. In such a case, the State should provide an income payment to the workforce in lieu of the wage income which they would have earned if employed; in addition, however, since the right to employment is

Some 'Reservations' on the Modi Government's Reservation for EWS

Surajit Mazumdar

I

not the only economic right, but has to be supplemented by a whole set of other economic rights, the State has to provide these other rights as well. Income support, in other words, has to go together with the provision of free, quality, universal, public education; free, quality, universal, public healthcare through a National Health Service; subsidised food through a universal PDS; adequate old-age pension and disability benefits; and so on.

Putting it differently, if citizenship is to encompass a set of universal economic rights, which it must if poverty alleviation is not to become a matter of largesse by the State, then income support can only be a means of realising one of the rights that is otherwise supposedly unattainable, namely the right to employment. But this does not negate the need for guaranteeing the other rights, such as the right to free education and free healthcare etc. Income support cannot be a substitute for these other rights. It has to be combined with these other rights.

(Prabhat Patnaik taught at the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning in Jawaharlal Nehru University from 1974 until his retirement in 2010.)

Since independence and even earlier, India has been characterised by an enduring duality in which the reality of an inegalitarian and oppression-ridden society has co-existed with a widespread and even growing urge for equality and justice. The inequalities prevailing in Indian society are multi-dimensional in which new ones emerging with time are intertwined in complex but mutually reinforcing ways with those handed down from the past. Caste and gender discrimination are knitted into the fabric of a society whose economic domain is also marked by sharp inequalities in control over resources and exploitative relationships. Most Indians are subject to at least one among several inequalities and oppressions, an overwhelming majority of them to more than one acting in tandem and a considerable part to all of them. In the absence of changes that would address the structural roots of these, affirmative action in the form of reservations in education and public employment—for members of social groups who are disadvantaged by the social realities from accessing the limited opportunities for these—has been the only substantive response of the Indian state to the demands for equality and justice. The creation and development of this reservation policy and its implementation has also been impaired by the resistance from the more privileged sections of Indian society and their power.

Opposition to caste-based reservations has expressed itself from time to time without succeeding in abolishing it or preventing some expansion in its scope. Indeed, how far at least the political discourse in India had moved was reflected in the fact that anti-reservation movements had to also couch their opposition as a fight against 'casteism'. Another example of this was the emergence of a political 'consensus' such that no major political formation operating within the framework of India's electoral democracy opposes the reservation policy, even if in government they only serve the interests of the privileged. More recently, we have also seen traditionally higher status caste groups demand recognition of their 'backwardness' and the extension of the benefit of reservations to them. From the old anti-reservation movements that were rooted in pure caste prejudice to these new demands for reservations that could have some basis also in the agrarian crisis produced by the impact of neo-liberalism in India—the significant existence of poverty and low economic status within the minority of the population excluded from the ambit of caste-based reservation has always been evoked. Are they not disadvantaged too and aren't many of them poorer than most of the actual beneficiaries of reservation? This is the question that has been thus always posed.

It is, however, a gross manipulation of the idea of equality

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if the disadvantages of economic backwardness of some within them are highlighted only to create an upper caste consolidation in favour of preserving a structure of caste and class privilege—which is also at the root of the economic backwardness being referred to. This would be no different from the contradiction that has always been visible in India but become even more marked in the last three decades—the invoking of the poverty of most Indians to rationalise economic policies which have exacerbated poverty, unemployment and inequality. A fundamentally different politics is to rupture any such upper caste unity and create instead a wider unity of the underprivileged in the struggle for transforming the socio-economic structure of caste and class privilege itself—which is certainly not the politics which the BJP represents. A case for incorporating within the reservation system some component based on an economic criterion had emerged in the past as part of an effort to create a larger social consensus in favour of the policy of reservation in education and public employment for SCs, STs and subsequently OBCs. However, the Modi government's desperate move to introduce reservation for 'economically weaker sections', sidestepping through a recourse to Constitutional amendments the constraints on such reservation imposed by Supreme Court judgments, clearly doesn't fall in that category. It is instead a naked attempt to fortify its electoral prospects by creating an upper caste consolidation.

II

There are so many aspects of the introduction of reservation for

'economically weaker sections' that are obvious indicators of its true political intent. The first is of course its timing—the fact that it was introduced four and a half-years after the Government assumed office and as the country is heading towards the national elections, and soon after the BJP suffered electoral reverses in three states it had been ruling, made it clear what prompted it. The haste with which the Constitutional amendments were pushed through in a matter of such magnitude, bypassing normal Parliamentary procedure and without the conduct of any proper study which could provide a sound basis for any policy, only adds to the evidence of the cynical calculations behind the Modi government's move. Even the data generated by the Socio-Economic Caste Census but not yet made public was not used for this purpose.

That the measure is largely for propaganda purposes and has little real benefits to offer to anyone is also clear from the Modi Government's record on the employment front, particularly in public sector employment. Union Budget documents show that about 75,000 jobs were lost in Central Government Establishments (Ministries, Railways, Postal Department, Police, etc.) between 2014 and 2017, and evidence indicates further reduction in 2018. According to the Public Enterprises Survey, in Central Public-Sector Enterprises (PSEs) total employment has shrunk from 16.91 lakhs in 2014 to 14.66 lakhs in 2018—2 lakh 25 thousand jobs have vanished. RBI data shows that in Public Sector Banks, some trend of increase between 2009 and 2015 was reversed and in the next two years some 35,000 jobs were lost. Thus, if the jobs to which reservation could

apply are themselves disappearing, how many can get the benefit of any new additional reservation flowing from the Constitutional amendment whose passage by the Lok Sabha was described by Modi as "a landmark moment in our nation's history"? As regards admissions to higher education institutions, the MHRD and the UGC which have been quick to instruct Central institutions to implement the new reservation policy, have not too long ago also been the chief actors in slashing the number of admissions to the research programmes in these institutions through the imposition of the UGC 2016 Regulations.

That the Modi Government is appealing to upper caste identity rather than economic backwardness is also evident from the criteria by which the economically weaker sections are being defined. Fixing of the level of the annual family income below which one would be deemed to be economically weak and eligible for reservation at Rupees 8 lakh (or almost 67,000 rupees a month) is bizarre given India's economic realities where more than 95 per cent of the population has a lower income level. The number of individuals declaring an annual income above Rs 8 lakh wouldn't even number 1 crore in a population of over 130 crores. A significant section of even regularly employed government and public sector employees would be having an annual income below the 8 lakh level. Would the Government be willing to use the same criteria of economic backwardness to identify who should be beneficiaries of 'targeted' schemes or use it as a justification for raising MNREGA wages and raising the minimum salary levels of its own employees? Other than in the context of reservation,

would the Modi government be even willing to concede that such a large proportion of Indians are economically backward and poor?

However, while all the above have allowed people to see through the hollowness of this “welfare” measure of the Modi government and to understand its true intent, there are also deeper issues which go beyond these. The policy of reserving 10 per cent of seats/jobs for the economically weaker sections, as is being implemented by the BJP government, in effect is insidiously redefining and perverting the meaning of ‘equality’. This may be the real long-term consequence of the cynical short-term and ill thought out gimmickry of the Modi Government. If it passes judicial scrutiny in its current form, it might mean a more fundamental change to the Constitution.

III

In the reservation policy that has been in force, general category candidates were eligible to be considered for all unreserved posts. This category therefore doesn’t refer to any distinct social group for whom 50.5% of seats or positions were reserved—it in fact includes all sections of society but without any reference to their social and economic position. Any one making the cut in the general merit list (even someone eligible for SC/ST or OBC reservation) was assigned an unreserved seat/post. The 10 per cent reserved for economically weaker sections under the new policy, however, is not similarly open to anyone irrespective of social background as long as they meet the additional criteria of economic backwardness—it is only available to “persons who are not

covered under the existing scheme of reservations for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and Socially and Educationally Backward Classes”. In this exclusion of SCs/STs and OBCs from its purview lies a problem.

‘Economically weaker section’ is defined solely based on some economic status. As such, it cannot privilege those who have this exclusive disadvantage vis-à-vis those who have an additional disadvantage derived from caste status. No constitutional amendment should be able to bring such a privileging within the ambit of ‘equality’. It is precisely such a privileging, however, that is inevitable if the economically weaker among SCs, STs and OBCs are excluded from the purview of the 10 per cent reserved for the economically weak. Even a poor SC/ST or OBC candidate with a higher merit position may have to be passed over to allot a seat or a post to someone in this set of reserved positions. Indeed, since the income threshold for determining who is economically backward is identical to that for separating the creamy layer among OBCs, the new policy of reservation means excluding all SCs, STs and OBCs from 10 per cent of seats/posts—which amounts to discrimination and reversal of one of the underlying principles of affirmative action.

When the same economic level is employed to determine who is purely backward economically as employed to exclude the creamy-layer among OBCs, it amounts to saying that OBCs and anyone who does not suffer any disadvantage from caste status are also the same if they have the same level of economic disadvantage. Both are entitled to

reservation on an equivalent basis—one to 27 per cent of seats/posts and the other to 10 per cent of the total—which is the same as saying there is 37 per cent reservation for the economically disadvantaged divided up among two groups of those so disadvantaged. In the process what is forgotten is the fact that the creamy layer in OBCs is not supposed to be made up of those who are free from economic backwardness but those whose economic privileges are of such an order as to enable them to overcome the social disadvantages of their caste status. A distinction is made in this regard between OBCs and SCs only because the latter are subject to the most extreme social oppression which no economic status can neutralise.

The equation of the non-creamy layer among OBCs and the economically weak among others who don’t suffer a caste related social disadvantage also of course increases the proportion of the latter even in the total population of the country. Even then, it has not even been ascertained what is that share or what would be the share if a more reasonable criteria of defining economically weak were to be adopted. Are they high enough to justify a 10 per cent reservation for that group when the OBC reservation is capped at 27 per cent, a proportion that is way-way below their share in the Indian population? Indeed, if the proportion of reserved seats/posts can now exceed 50 per cent, one might ask—what is the rationale for keeping the OBC reservation capped at 27% when their proportion in the population is much higher? That the SC/ST reservation percentages are closer to their shares in the population while that in the case of OBCs was much

less can be justified in different ways including the fact of differences in the degree of discrimination and oppression these social groups have traditionally been subject to. However, no such rationale can justify the economically backward within those social groups not covered by any other reservation having any disproportionately larger benefit of reservation as compared to non-creamy layer OBCs. Within the 37 per cent, the division into 10 per cent reservation for the former and 27 per cent for the latter would without doubt amount to privileging the former unless they were far more than 20 per cent or so of the total Indian population. In other words, it has to be assumed that social groups who enjoy a disproportionately large share in the control over economic resources and representation in higher income groups are also almost entirely economic weak!

Reservation for SCs, STs and OBCs and such traditionally excluded groups also has a representational element—and it can be so because those getting the benefit of it do not lose in the process their membership of the social groups which they represent. If the reservation is only on a purely economic criterion, the same doesn't apply, particularly in public employment. If the bar for defining 'economically weak' is kept close to the minimum income in public employment, then anyone entering public employment ceases to be 'economically weak'. If on the other hand the bar is kept much higher, as it has been, then the 'economically weak' automatically have 'representation' in public employment—a significant proportion of such employees is automatically "economically weak" and this is because the government

pays them too little! The only way, therefore, that reservation for economically weaker sections does come under the ambit of 'representation' is by its limitation to those who do not have the benefits of SC/ST/OBC reservation—but that makes it a representation of those who are socially privileged and already over represented rather than of those who are economically backward.

IV

The complex issues opened up by any move to introduce reservations for economically weaker sections may have been examined, scrutinised and even

addressed in the formulation of a reservation policy—provided the intentions behind it were genuine and the necessary study, deliberation and discussion had been undertaken. That is not something the Modi government has time for—in its haste to play on the upper caste sentiments that might exist on either side of an economic divide, it has initiated another jumla that achieves little in moving things forward and instead undoes some of the achievements of the past. That, unfortunately, has been a bit of a pattern with it.

(Surajit Mazumdar is a Professor of Economics in Jawaharlal Nehru University.)

Remembering George Fernandes As He Was, Before He Lost Himself

Nitya Ramakrishnan

George Fernandes first entered my life when I was six or seven years old, as a cause of envy. For, when he once came to Delhi, my father took my brother Niranjana to see him, leaving me behind. His signature scripted in Devanagari in my brother's autograph book was a daily reminder of the exclusion. But I did come to know George eventually, a privilege that I owe to my father K.G. Ramakrishnan, a lifelong socialist who had participated in the 1942 Quit India movement.

A friend and admirer of Ram Manohar Lohia, my father attributed the emerging relevance of George Fernandes in Indian politics to the genius of the great Doctor Sahib as much as to Fernandes's own array of talents. The secret of success

lies not only in knowing how to lead, but also in knowing how to be led, as Fernandes's equation—first with Placid D'Mello and then with Lohia—would bear out.

The socialist pantheon in the '60s and '70s was impressive, but even amongst its stalwarts, the cerebral Madhu Limaye and the dashing George Fernandes stood out. Lohia's uncanny instinct could spot and galvanise political energy to fight the degenerating ethos of the Congress party. Key to this was an organised workers' movement and George Fernandes was the man for this task.

George's march from a seminary in Bangalore to the trade unions of Bombay is legendary. The effortless mastery of Hindi, Marathi and

other languages, the ability to forge (and break) alliances and above all, the sheer magnetism that could command lasting loyalty, marked him with a heroism that would endure. It would endure because behind the dazzle and the sparkle lay a core of genuine moral courage. The many physical assaults and spells of incarceration that George suffered unflinchingly in free India gave hope that the spirit of Gandhi had survived the marginalisation of the Mahatma by the Congress.

The astonishing defeat of S.K. Patil in Bombay South brought George into the Lok Sabha in 1967, making it clear that his organisational talent was not limited to trade unionism. He had come to stay in national politics. The 1974 railway strike and its sabotage by a vicious state—through the betrayal of those who might have been his ideological comrades—is a story that must be told afresh for the coming generations. Here I will only refer to a remark Madhu Limaye made to me personally, in his usual dry tone, but barely masking a wealth of affection and admiration for his old comrade: “You all know of George’s ability in organising the strike—do you know what strategy and courage it took to call it off?”

As teenagers, our political baptism was the Emergency of 1975 and George Fernandes was its unmistakable hero. With his amazing contacts, he got wind of it in the evening of June 25, ahead of its declaration at midnight. In an instant, he disguised himself as a fisherman and went underground. My father met him in those days, which I did not then know. As I write, my brother tells me that on one occasion my father got into a waiting car where George was

sitting and drove around with him for an hour discussing resistance. They, the men in my family, kept all this exciting stuff from me. But just the thought that George was out and about in those dark days thrilled my young mind. Then, on June 10, 1976, he was caught. So important was his capture to the rulers and their opponents alike, that even the muzzled press could not but broadcast the fact. I myself learnt of it from the ‘Spot News’ stand on Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg and felt that all was now lost.

Shackled, not silenced

But, George Fernandes in chains proved more potent than a free George Fernandes. Every production in court was turned by him into a political campaign. Holding his manacled hands aloft, he would signify defiance with every gesture. That picture will be my lasting memory of George.

That spirit of defiance, the moral force of Jayaprakash Narayan’s leadership and some incidental factors led to the declaration of elections in 1977. Thinking first that it was a ruse for legitimising the Emergency, George and Madhu Limaye argued for a boycott but were wisely overruled.

George was in jail during the election campaign. I recall getting off a bus on my way home from college—at a stop just outside 5 Dupleix Road (now Kamraj Marg). That was then the home of Morarji Desai. The days were different and the leaders were not behind walls of security. I had only to walk in to meet Morarji bhai. I asked him why he had issued no statement in support of George Fernandes, who was contesting the election from prison. “I do not support violence.”

said the man clad in spotless white. Too disappointed and too young to understand the quality of his conviction, I made my way home with a heavy heart.

But the people of India were straining at the leash. And George Fernandes was George Fernandes. He “romped home” as per the election lingo of the times, from Muzzaffarpur, Bihar with nearly four lakh votes. The poster of the man in chains had done the trick once again.

The great communist leader A.K. Gopalan died just as the election results were coming in. At a condolence meeting on the lawns of Vithal Bhai Patel House, George Fernandes, who had been released that morning, spoke in Hindi. His last meeting with Gopalan had been while underground, and they had both noted how India’s vociferous trade unions had tamely buckled under the Emergency. Ruefully, they concluded that their trade unions had been grounded more in economism than in political ideology.

I pass over Fernandes’ initial reluctance to join the cabinet, his later enthusiastic stewardship of the Ministry of Industries and the ouster of Coca Cola—which was replaced by a soft drink christened 77 (Double Seven) by his fellow socialist H.V. Kamath. I also pass over his masterly defence of the Morarji government in Parliament (that I watched from the visitors’ gallery with my friend and George’s brother Michael)—only to join, on the next day, the suicidal bid for mid-term polls. That is oft repeated history. I refer instead to his public stand on political prisoners, and support to the cause of self-determination and human rights even while in power. I refer to this because it makes all the more poignant my grief over his alignment

with the BJP and his continued support to it during and after the Gujarat pogrom of 2002. As I told him, during a chance meeting in 2003 at a book release, it made me wish never to speak again with him. “But you are speaking to me now,” he said throwing an affectionate arm around my shoulders—but that was really the last time that I met or spoke with him.

“The wrath of the people will be upon you”, George Fernandes had warned members of parliament in a telegram, in the wake of the murder in 1966 of the charismatic tribal leader Pravir Chandra Bhanjdeo of Bastar—engineered, by a powerful politician of the time. My brother reminds me of this. Was it the same George in 2002?

Yet, before this, he was my first stop for many of our causes. I took to him every case for commutation of the death penalty. He was a minister I think when Kartar and Ujagar, the hired killers in the Vidya Jain murder case were to be hanged, while the chief minds behind the murder had been granted premature release. The class bias was shockingly evident. George pointed this out to the president and the cabinet, but to no avail. He campaigned against the unconscionable execution of Kehar Singh in the Indira Gandhi assassination case. And if there is any one reason that two condemned Dalit men are alive today in Andhra Pradesh, that reason is George Fernandes.

After a midnight reprieve of a week from the Supreme Court on Good Friday in 1996, just five hours before they were to be marched to the gallows, it was George Fernandes who (along with a team led by the great and good V.M. Tarkunde) persistently lobbied with the Deve

Gowda cabinet for their life. It was George who called to tell me that as one of Deve Gowda’s last prime ministerial acts the execution had been put off indefinitely (The final order of commutation came when K.R. Narayanan was president.)

Innumerable men detained without cause during the conflict years in Punjab were released with his intervention. His initiatives in Kashmir were stymied by a pusillanimous Centre and we are still facing the consequences of that crass insensitivity. Naga, Tibetan, Burmese and other politically targeted activists found a ready refuge in his home, even when it became a ministerial one. His own living quarters were in two rooms. The rest of his sprawling bungalow was home to trade unionists, party workers and human rights activists and their various causes. There was no security paraphernalia and he often drove a battered Fiat himself.

His election campaigns were a joy to behold. Indefatigable, eating by the roadside or going without food, his whole being was a political statement. With numerous electoral victories, he was perfectly at home in any part of the country. But the great thing is that, even in defeat, he secured dividends. The fateful Chikmagalur by-election of 1978 brought Indira Gandhi back into Parliament. She had been routed in 1977 chiefly by the North and so chose the safer South for a re-entry. Besides, Karnataka was under Congress rule at the time. George ran the campaign for Janata Party’s Virendra Patil against her. The simplicity of his attire and manners made people frankly incredulous that this man was a minister! He electrified the atmosphere. Though Mrs Gandhi won, George Fernandes

had managed to strengthen the Janata Party in Karnataka.

I wrote after the Tehelka sting of 2001 that as an expose it was overrated—and flimsy. It was a sham in the face of the daily atrocities that the underprivileged in this country reel under but go unnoticed by the media. None could believe that Fernandes was corrupt. Even Tehelka could allege nothing against him personally. In fact, the armed forces were enthused by his visit to each station in India’s inclement frontiers, and by the unprecedented ministerial attention to their needs of gear and sustenance. The tragedy of George Fernandes was not that he was corrupt but that he had lost himself. I retain the sense of betrayal that such a powerhouse of courage, brilliance and energy should have sided with and attempted to legitimise the BJP, which represents the greatest ever assault upon the idea of India.

Brilliance and energy are the two words that I will always associate with George Fernandes. My grief at his involuntary silence that is owed now to the collapse of his health is equal to my grief at his deliberate silence that came more than a decade earlier—a silence that was owed to the tragic collapse of his judgment. But while I find it hard to come to terms with the final phase of his political career, in the history of the socialist movement as a whole, George Fernandes will rank as one of the most dynamic associates of the incomparable Doctor Sahib.

[Nitya Ramakrishnan is a lawyer. Originally written for a souvenir brought out by the Hind Mazdoor Kisan Panchayat (HMKP) to mark George Fernandes’s 88th birthday, June 3, 2018.]

Agroecology and the Fight Against Deadly Capitalist Agriculture

Colin Todhunter

Food and agriculture across the world is in crisis. Food is becoming denitrified and unhealthy and diets less diverse. There is a loss of biodiversity, which threatens food security, soils are being degraded, water sources polluted and depleted and smallholder farmers, so vital to global food production, are being squeezed off their land and out of farming.

A minority of the global population has access to so much food that it can afford to waste much of it, while food insecurity has become a fact of life for hundreds of millions. This crisis stems from food and agriculture being wedded to power structures that serve the interests of the powerful global agribusiness corporations.

Over the last 60 years, agriculture has become increasingly industrialised, globalised and tied to an international system of trade based on export-oriented monocropping, commodity production for the international market, and indebtedness to international financial institutions (IMF/World Bank).

This has resulted in food surplus and food deficit areas, of which the latter have become dependent on (US) agricultural imports and strings-attached aid. Food deficits in the Global South mirror food surpluses in the North, based on a 'stuffed and starved' strategy.

Whether through IMF–World Bank structural adjustment programmes related to debt repayment as occurred in Africa (as a continent Africa has been

transformed from a net exporter to a net importer of food), bilateral trade agreements like NAFTA and its impact on Mexico or, more generally, deregulated global trade rules, the outcome has been similar: the devastation of traditional, indigenous agriculture.

Integral to all of this has been the imposition of the 'Green Revolution'. Farmers were encouraged to purchase hybrid seeds from corporations that were dependent on chemical fertilisers and pesticides to boost yields. They required loans to purchase these corporate inputs and governments borrowed to finance irrigation and dam building projects for what was a water-intensive model.

While the Green Revolution was sold to governments and farmers on the basis that it would increase productivity and earnings and would be more efficient, we now have nations and farmers incorporated into a system of international capitalism based on dependency, deregulated and manipulated commodity markets, unfair subsidies and inherent food insecurity.

As part of a wider 'development' plan for the Global South, millions of farmers have been forced out of agriculture to become cheap factory labour (for outsourced units from the West) or, as is increasingly the case, unemployed or underemployed slum dwellers.

In India, under the banner of a bogus notion of 'development', farmers are being whipped into subservience on behalf of global capital: they find themselves steadily

squeezed out of farming due to falling incomes, the impact of cheap imports and policies deliberately designed to run down smallholder agriculture for the benefit of global agribusiness corporations.

Aside from the geopolitical shift in favour of the Western nations resulting from the programmed destruction of traditional agriculture across the world, the Green Revolution has adversely impacted the nature of food, soil, human health and the environment.

Sold on the premise of increased yields, improved food security and better farm incomes, the benefits of the Green Revolution have been overstated. And the often stated 'humanitarian' intent and outcome ('millions of lives saved') has had more to do with PR and cold commercial interest.

However, even when the Green Revolution did increase yields (or similarly, if claims about GMO agriculture—the second coming of the Green Revolution—improving output are to be accepted at face value), Canadian environmentalist Jodi Koberinski says pertinent questions need to be asked: what has been the cost of any increased yield of commodities in terms of local food security and local caloric production, nutrition per acre, water tables, soil structure and new pests and disease pressures?

We may also ask what the effects on rural communities and economies have been; on birds, insects and biodiversity in general; on the climate as a result of new technologies, inputs or changes to

farming practices; and what have been the effects of shifting towards globalised production chains, not least in terms of transportation and fossil fuel consumption.

Moreover, if the Green Revolution found farmers in the Global South increasingly at the mercy of a US-centric system of trade and agriculture, at home they were also having to fit in with development policies that pushed for urbanisation and had to cater to the needs of a distant and expanding urban population whose food requirements were different from local rural-based communities. In addition to a focus on export-oriented farming, crops were also being grown for the urban market, regardless of farmers' needs or the dietary requirements of local rural markets.

Destroying indigenous systems

In an open letter written in 2006 to policy makers in India, farmer and campaigner Bhaskar Save offered answers to some of these questions. He argued that the actual reason for pushing the Green Revolution was the much narrower goal of increasing marketable surplus of a few relatively less perishable cereals to fuel the urban-industrial expansion favoured by the government and a few industries at the expense of a more diverse and nutrient-sufficient agriculture, which rural folk—who make up the bulk of India's population—had long benefited from.

Before, Indian farmers had been largely self-sufficient and even produced surpluses, though generally smaller quantities of many more items. These, particularly perishables, were tougher to supply to urban markets. And so,

the nation's farmers were steered to grow chemically cultivated monocultures of a few cash-crops like wheat, rice or sugar, rather than their traditional polycultures that needed no purchased inputs.

Tall, indigenous varieties of grain provided more biomass, shaded the soil from the sun and protected against its erosion under heavy monsoon rains, but these very replaced with dwarf varieties, which led to more vigorous growth of weeds as they were able to compete successfully with the new stunted crops for sunlight.

As a result, the farmer had to spend more labour and money in weeding, or spraying herbicides. Furthermore, straw growth with the dwarf grain crops fell and much less organic matter was locally available to recycle the fertility of the soil, leading to an artificial need for externally procured inputs. Inevitably, the farmers resorted to use of more chemicals, because of which soil degradation and erosion set in.

The exotic varieties, grown with chemical fertilisers, were more susceptible to 'pests and diseases', leading to yet more chemicals being poured. But the attacked insect species developed resistance and reproduced prolifically. Their predators—spiders, frogs, etc.—that fed on these insects and controlled their populations were exterminated. So were many beneficial species like the earthworms and bees.

Save noted that India, next to South America, receives the highest rainfall in the world. Where thick vegetation covers the ground, the soil is alive and porous and at least half of the rain is soaked and stored in the soil and sub-soil strata.

A good amount then percolates

deeper to recharge aquifers or groundwater tables. The living soil and its underlying aquifers thus serve as gigantic, ready-made reservoirs. Half a century ago, most parts of India had enough fresh water all year round, long after the rains had stopped and gone. But clear the forests, and the capacity of the earth to soak the rain drops drastically. Streams and wells run dry.

While the recharge of groundwater has greatly reduced, its extraction has been mounting. India is presently mining over 20 times more groundwater each day than it did in 1950. But most of India's people—living on hand-drawn or hand-pumped water in villages and practising only rain-fed farming—continue to use the same amount of ground water per person, as they did generations ago.

More than 80% of India's water consumption is for irrigation, with the largest share hogged by chemically cultivated cash crops. For example, one acre of chemically grown sugarcane requires as much water as would suffice 25 acres of jowar, bajra or maize. The sugar factories too consume huge quantities of water.

From cultivation to processing, each kilo of refined sugar needs two to three tonnes of water. Save argued that this could be used to grow, by the traditional, organic way, about 150 to 200 kg of nutritious jowar or bajra.

If Bhaskar Save helped open people's eyes to what has happened on the farm, to farmers and to ecology in India, a 2015 report by GRAIN provides an overview of how US agribusiness has hijacked an entire nation's food and agriculture under the banner of 'free trade' to the detriment of the environment, health

and farmers.

In 2012, Mexico's National Institute for Public Health released the results of a national survey of food security and nutrition. Between 1988 and 2012, the proportion of overweight women between the ages of 20 and 49 increased from 25% to 35% and the number of obese women in this age group increased from 9% to 37%.

Some 29% of Mexican children between the ages of 5 and 11 were found to be overweight, as were 35% of youngsters between 11 and 19, while one in 10 school age children suffered from anaemia. The Mexican Diabetes Federation says that more than 7% of the Mexican population has diabetes. Diabetes is now the third most common cause of death in Mexico, directly or indirectly.

The various free trade agreements that Mexico has signed over the past two decades have had a profound impact on the country's food system and people's health. After his mission to Mexico in 2012, the then Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, concluded that the trade policies in place favour greater reliance on heavily processed and refined foods with a long shelf life rather than on the consumption of fresh and more perishable foods, particularly fruit and vegetables.

He added that the overweight and obesity emergency that Mexico is facing could have been avoided, or largely mitigated, if the health concerns linked to shifting diets had been integrated into the design of those policies.

The North America Free Trade Agreement led to huge foreign investment in food processing and a change in the retail structure

(notably the advent of supermarkets and convenience stores) as well as the emergence of global agribusiness and transnational food companies in Mexico.

The country has witnessed an explosive growth of chain supermarkets, discounters and convenience stores. Local small-scale vendors have been replaced by corporate retailers that offer the processed food companies greater opportunities for sales and profits. Oxxo (owned by Coca-cola subsidiary Femsa) tripled its stores to 3,500 between 1999 and 2004. It was scheduled to open its 14,000th store sometime during 2015.

In Mexico, the loss of food sovereignty has induced catastrophic changes in the nation's diet and has had dire consequences for agricultural workers who lost their jobs and for the nation in general. Those who have benefited include US food and agribusiness interests, drug cartels and US banks and arms manufacturers.

More of the same: a bogus 'solution'

Transnational agribusiness has lobbied for, directed and profited from the very policies that have caused much of the above. And what we now see is these corporations (and their supporters) espousing cynical and fake concern for the plight of the poor and hungry.

GMO patented seeds represent the final stranglehold of transnational agribusiness over the control of agriculture and food. The misrepresentation of the plight of the indigenous edible oils sector in India indicates encapsulates the duplicity at work surrounding the GM project.

After trade rules and cheap imports conspired to destroy farmers

and the jobs of people involved in local food processing activities for the benefit of global agribusiness, including commodity trading and food processor companies ADM and Cargill, there is now a campaign to force GM into India on the basis that Indian agriculture is unproductive and thus the country has to rely on imports. This conveniently ignores the fact that prior to neoliberal trade rules in the mid-1990s, India was almost self-sufficient in edible oils.

In collusion with the Gates Foundation, corporate interests are also seeking to secure full spectrum dominance throughout much of Africa as well. Western seed, fertiliser and pesticide manufacturers and dealers and food processing companies are in the process of securing changes to legislation and are building up logistics and infrastructure to allow them to recast food and farming in their own images.

Today, governments continue to collude with big agribusiness corporations. These companies are being allowed to shape government policy by being granted a strategic role in trade negotiations and are increasingly framing the policy/knowledge agenda by funding and determining the nature of research carried out in public universities and institutes.

As Bhaskar Save wrote about India: "This country has more than 150 agricultural universities. But every year, each churns out several hundred 'educated' unemployables, trained only in misguiding farmers and spreading ecological degradation. In all the six years a student spends for an M.Sc. in agriculture, the only goal is short-term—and narrowly perceived—'productivity'. For this, the farmer

is urged to do and buy a hundred things. But not a thought is spared to what a farmer must never do so that the land remains unharmed for future generations and other creatures. It is time our people and government wake up to the realisation that this industry-driven way of farming—promoted by our institutions—is inherently criminal and suicidal!”

Save is referring to the 300,000-plus farmer suicides that have taken place in India over the past two decades due to economic distress resulting from debt, a shift to (GM) cash crops and economic ‘liberalisation’.

The current global system of chemical-industrial agriculture, World Trade Organisation rules and bilateral trade agreements that agritech companies helped draw up are a major cause of food insecurity and environmental destruction. The system is not set up to ‘feed the world’ despite the proclamations of its supporters.

However, this model has become central to the dominant notion of ‘development’ in the Global South: unnecessary urbanisation, the commercialisation and emptying out of the countryside at the behest of the World Bank, the displacement of existing systems of food and agricultural production with one dominated by Monsanto-Bayer, Cargill and the like and a one-dimensional pursuit of GDP growth as a measure of ‘progress’ with little concern for the costs and implications—mirroring the narrow, reductionist ‘output–yield’ paradigm of industrial agriculture itself.

Agroecology offers a genuine solution

Across the world, we are seeing farmers and communities pushing

back and resisting the corporate takeover of seeds, soils, land, water and food. And we are also witnessing inspiring stories about the successes of agroecology.

Reflecting what Bhaskar Save achieved on his farm in Gujarat, agroecology combines sound ecological management, including minimising the use of toxic inputs, by using on-farm renewable resources and privileging natural solutions to manage pests and disease, with an approach that upholds and secures farmers’ livelihoods.

Agroecology is based on scientific research grounded in the natural sciences but marries this with farmer-generated knowledge and grassroots participation that challenges top-down approaches to research and policy making. However, it can also involve moving beyond the dynamics of the farm itself to becoming part of a wider agenda, which addresses the broader political and economic issues that impact farmers and agriculture.

Agroecology is thus a refreshing point of departure from the reductionist approach to farming which emphasises securing maximum yield and corporate profit to the detriment of all else.

Agroecology can lead to fundamental changes

A few years ago, the Oakland Institute released a report on 33 case studies which highlighted the success of agroecological agriculture across Africa in the face of climate change, hunger and poverty. The studies provide facts and figures on how agricultural transformation can yield immense economic, social, and food security benefits while ensuring climate justice and restoring soils and the environment.

The research highlights the multiple benefits of agroecology, including affordable and sustainable ways to boost agricultural yields while increasing farmers’ incomes, food security and crop resilience.

The report described how agroecology uses a wide variety of techniques and practices, including plant diversification, intercropping, the application of mulch, manure or compost for soil fertility, the natural management of pests and diseases, agroforestry and the construction of water management structures.

There are many other examples of successful agroecology and of farmers abandoning Green Revolution thought and practices to embrace it.

In a recent interview appearing on the *Farming Matters* website, Million Belay sheds light on how agroecological agriculture is the best model of agriculture for Africa. Belay explains that one of the greatest agroecological initiatives started in 1995 in Tigray, Northern Ethiopia, and continues today. It began with four villages and after good results, it was scaled up to 83 villages and finally to the whole Tigray Region. It was recommended to the Ministry of Agriculture to be scaled up at the national level. The project has now expanded to six regions of Ethiopia.

The fact that it was supported with research by the Ethiopian University at Mekele has proved to be critical in convincing decision makers that these practices work and are better for both the farmers and the land.

Belay describes another agroecological practice that spread widely across East Africa—‘push-pull’. This method manages pests through selective intercropping

with important fodder species and wild grass relatives, in which pests are simultaneously repelled—or pushed—from the system by one or more plants and are attracted to—or pulled—towards ‘decoy’ plants, thereby protecting the crop from infestation. Push-pull has proved to be very effective in biologically controlling pest populations in fields, reducing significantly the need for pesticides, increasing production, especially for maize, increasing income of farmers, increasing fodder for animals and, due to that, increasing milk production, and improving soil fertility.

By 2015, the number of farmers using this practice increased to 95,000. One of the bedrocks of success is the incorporation of cutting edge science through the collaboration of the International Center of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE) and the Rothamsted Research Station (UK) who have worked in East Africa for the last 15 years on an effective ecologically-based pest management solution for stem borers and striga.

But agroecology should not just be regarded as something for the Global South. Food First Executive Director Eric Holtz-Gimenez argues that it offers concrete, practical solutions to many of the world’s problems that move beyond (but which are linked to) agriculture. In doing so, it challenges—and offers alternatives to—prevailing moribund doctrinaire economics and the outright plunder of neoliberalism.

The scaling up of agroecology can tackle hunger, malnutrition, environmental degradation and climate change. By creating securely paid labour-intensive agricultural work, it can also address the interrelated links between labour

offshoring by rich countries and the removal of rural populations elsewhere who end up in sweat shops to carry out the outsourced jobs.

Thick legitimacy

Various official reports have argued that to feed the hungry and secure food security in low income regions, we need to support small farms and diverse, sustainable agroecological methods of farming and strengthen local food economies.

Olivier De Schutter says: “To feed 9 billion people in 2050, we urgently need to adopt the most efficient farming techniques available. Today’s scientific evidence demonstrates that agroecological methods outperform the use of chemical fertilisers in boosting food production where the hungry live, especially in unfavorable environments.”

De Schutter indicates that small-scale farmers can double food production within 10 years in critical regions by using ecological methods. Based on an extensive review of scientific literature, the study he was involved in calls for a fundamental shift towards agroecology as a way to boost food production and improve the situation of the poorest. The report calls on states to implement a fundamental shift towards agroecology.

The success stories of agroecology indicate what can be achieved when development is placed firmly in the hands of farmers themselves. The expansion of agroecological practices can generate a rapid, fair and inclusive development that can be sustained for future generations. This model entails policies and activities that come from the bottom-up and which the state can then invest in and

facilitate.

A decentralised system of food production with access to local markets supported by proper roads, storage and other infrastructure must take priority ahead of exploitative international markets dominated and designed to serve the needs of global capital.

It has long been established that small farms are per area more productive than large-scale industrial farms and create a more resilient and diverse food system. If policy makers were to prioritise this sector and promote agroecology to the extent Green Revolution practices and technology have been pushed, many of the problems surrounding poverty, unemployment and urban migration could be solved.

However, the biggest challenge for upscaling agroecology lies in the push by big business for commercial agriculture and attempts to marginalise agroecology. Unfortunately, global agribusiness concerns have secured the status of ‘thick legitimacy’ based on an intricate web of processes successfully spun in the scientific, policy and political arenas. This perceived legitimacy derives from the lobbying, financial clout and political power of agribusiness conglomerates which have been successful in capturing or shaping government departments, public institutions, the agricultural research paradigm, international trade and the cultural narrative concerning food and agriculture.

This allows its model to persist and appear normal and necessary. While critics of this system are viciously attacked for being anti-science, for forwarding unrealistic alternatives, for endangering the lives of billions who would starve

to death and for being driven by ideology and emotion.

This has led to a situation wherein so many governments are working hand-in-glove with agribusiness industry to promote its technology over the heads of the public. A network of scientific bodies and regulatory agencies that supposedly serve the public interest have been subverted by the presence of key figures with industry links, while the powerful industry lobby holds sway over bureaucrats and politicians.

Agribusiness corporations have in fact come to acquire so much power over global agriculture that they are involved in writing international agreements. Monsanto played a key part in drafting the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights to create seed monopolies and the global food processing industry had a leading role in shaping the WTO Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures. From the Knowledge Initiative on Agriculture aimed at restructuring Indian agriculture to the currently on-hold US–EU trade deal (TTIP), the powerful agribusiness lobby has secured privileged access to policy makers to ensure its model of agriculture prevails.

Therefore, challenging the dominant model of agriculture being promoted by multinational agribusiness corporations, and promoting agroecology as an alternative model, will require challenging the ‘thick legitimacy’ that has presently been acquired by it. An important step will be the building of small agroecology alternatives. The more agroecology is seen to work, the more policy

makers may see the failings of the current system and the more they may become open to holistic approaches to agriculture. As practitioners and supporters of agroecology create their own thick legitimacy, the more officials might be willing to give space to a model that has great potential to help deal with some of the world’s most pressing problems. It has happened to a certain extent in Ethiopia, for example. That is hopeful.

Of course, simply building small islands of agroecology will not be enough to challenge the

dominant discourse about chemical intensive corporate agriculture. Simultaneously, mass movements will need to be built that challenge the stranglehold of corporations over national and international policies, including agricultural policies. These mass movements will need to link up across continents. Till then, agroecology will remain on the periphery.

(Colin Todhunter is originally from the UK. A former social policy researcher, he is a widely acclaimed journalist who writes extensively on development issues.)

Everyday Life in Besieged Venezuela

Cira Pascual Marquina interviews Jessica Dos Santos

Cira P. Marquina: *Much has been written in a very general sense about Venezuela’s current situation. For example, we hear a great deal about the economic war, sanctions, imperialist meddling, and even communal organisation and building popular power. But very little is said about daily life: for example, about the difficulties we face every day in a city like Caracas. Would you say that being a chronicler of everyday life is a political act? What happens to politics when it doesn’t connect with concrete reality and when daily life is not taken into account?*

Jessica Santos: Well, I am one of those people who believe that absolutely everything in life is a political act, from the way we feed ourselves to our way of speaking. And that is perhaps the key to understanding why politics goes beyond and must go beyond party politics. Therefore, I agree with you.

I think that being a chronicler of

everyday life is a political act that seeks to record the day-to-day and lays out, in some way or other, the main episodes of the story we are living. It is an attempt to leave traces that will later allow us to reconstruct a scene. It helps us know what was happening moment by moment leading up to this or that event.

For that reason, when politics does not connect with concrete reality or does not take daily life into account, it ends up becoming an endless number of speeches that do not connect with anything. It can be empty and so contradictory as to be shameless. This inevitably generates discontent in the population as the people do not find their real life reflected in the political discourse.

For example, many parts of President Nicolás Maduro’s speech during his Annual Address have nothing to do with what the Venezuelan people experience on a daily basis. In the same way, Guaidó

doesn't win people over saying that among his first political projects is the return of the RCTV channel. These are things that don't make any sense in a country with problems as serious as ours.

Alejo Carpentier said that the work of Latin American writers was different from that of writers elsewhere. Writers from our continent have to describe things (such as the bizarre and huge ceiba tree or the noisy macaw) with a lot of attention to detail, because they have not previously figured in narratives. Is your work as a chronicler something like that? Can you give us an example of a "ceiba," a unique and previously undescribed reality, in Venezuelan daily life?

Yes, my work is more or less like that. But I also have the enormous advantage of having been born in the Caribbean. Gabriel García Márquez says in *The Fragrance of Guava* that the Caribbean teaches us to see reality in a different way and accept "supernatural elements" as something that is part of our daily life. The Caribbean is a world apart. The human synthesis and the contrasts here are not present anywhere else in the world.

A "ceiba" of Venezuelan daily life? One example would be precisely our way of dealing with the complex situations that we are facing today. Once a Chilean friend, who was obviously annoyed, told me that she did not understand why we take everything as a joke here. Perhaps what she and others do not understand is that this is our way of processing and overcoming what happens. But that way of dealing with things doesn't make us crazy or unaware.

For example, on the day commemorating January 23, I

happened to see both marches. Then I went home and spent the whole afternoon following the events. It was really tense, but in the middle of all of it, there was a lot being said on the networks and messages from friends that made me laugh without stopping. If we weren't this way, perhaps we would have lost our minds. Furthermore, our idiosyncratic way of being in the world in some way or other brings us all together.

Another "ceiba" or "macaw" [a la Carpentier] would be to tell the story of how Venezuelans try to lead "normal" lives in the middle of all the abnormality that we experience. It is not normal to see the same product change prices three times a day, or the amazing speed of information in our country. Nevertheless, we're trying to change all that and come out ahead.

Street protests are on the rise again. Previously they were in rural areas and the demands included access to food and services but just recently this kind of protest has hit Caracas. Unlike the guarimbas of 2014 and 2017, these protests have an organic relation to the poor and their needs: a material situation that is very extreme. What should our attitude towards these protests be? Should we question them? Should we work to bring the protestors back to the Chavista fold?

We should differentiate among different kinds of protests, separating one kind from another. In Venezuela, there have been protests for many months, and they have been triggered by the breakdown of public services and utilities: electricity, water, cooking gas, public transport. Protests against this kind of situation are absolutely valid and, from my point of view, should not be called

into question. Rather, they must be heard, and the demands should be urgently addressed and taken seriously. Furthermore, dealing with these problems is the only way to recover the people's trust. These, then, are popular protests.

By contrast, protests that end up in acts of vandalism, protests where houses are burned, cars are turned over, neighbors are attacked, etc.—they do not contribute to anything, nor do they reflect the intentions of the majority. In fact, they end up tarnishing the just claims of the people. People want services and utilities that work, a stable economy, and they want children who have left the country to return. You don't get there by destroying what we have left.

As a Chavista, you support the government, but you do so critically. This support is unbending in the face of the imperialist threat, but it is coupled with a willingness to criticise a government that (from my perspective) shows signs of distancing itself from the people. Can you help us to understand what it means to fight on two battlefronts, one against imperialism and against the opposition, and another a fight on a more fluid battlefront that demands that the government provide solutions to the people's needs?

When I was a teenager I read all the Che Guevara journals, and I read them several times. In one, he wrote that those who occupy a middle position during a battle get shot at from both sides. Thus, one should always clearly choose a side.

For a long time, I tried to internalise that as an irrefutable truth. And I continue to do so. But later I came to understand that the side we choose, our side, should be

that of the people. We must choose to be with the majorities, with those who suffer as we do. If the extreme positions are out of touch with the people and one ends up in the middle, then you have to accept your middle position and make noise about it so that things will change.

All of that refers to the internal struggle. However, when it comes to fighting against foreign intervention, then there isn't much to think about: our home country is and must be first. And this is not just because of our love for it, but also because we have historical awareness. There isn't one single nation that has come out better after a US or NATO intervention. In addition to that, intervention presupposes that we don't have the capacity to solve our own problems, and I firmly believe that we can.

(Jessica Dos Santos, who grew up with the Bolivarian Revolution, is a university professor and journalist, but for many she has found her true calling as a chronicler of everyday life in Venezuela. This interview with her was first published on venezuelanalysis.com on January 31, 2019.)

Billionaires are the Leading Cause of Climate Change

Luke Darby

Recently, the United Nations released a damning report. The short version: We have about 12 years to *actually* do something to *prevent* the worst aspects of climate change. That is, not to prevent climate change—we're well past that point—but to prevent the worst, most catastrophic elements of it from wreaking havoc on the world's population. To do that, the governments of Earth need to look seriously at the forces driving it. And an honest assessment of how we got here lays the blame squarely at the feet of the 1 percent.

Contrary to a lot of guilt-tripping pleas for us all to take the bus more often to save the world, your individual choices are probably doing very little to the world's climate. The real impact comes on the industrial level, as more than 70 percent of global emissions come from just 100 companies. So you, a random consumer, exert very little pressure here. The people who are actively cranking up the global thermostat and threatening to drown 20 percent of the global population are the billionaires in the boardrooms of these companies.

There are probably no individuals who have had a more toxic impact on public and political attitudes about climate change than the Koch brothers, and it would take an absurd amount of space to document all the money and organisations they've scraped together for that purpose. (Investigative reporter Jane Mayer's groundbreaking *Dark Money* does basically that.) And they have every

reason to: In her book, Mayer notes that "Koch Industries alone routinely released some 24 million tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere a year."

But the scope goes far beyond merely sowing dissent and skepticism. While billionaires and the companies they run have spent years insisting that climate change either doesn't exist or is overblown, they've known the reality of the situation for a long time. PayPal cofounder Peter Thiel, for example, used to donate to the Seasteading Institute, which aimed to build floating cities in order to counteract rising sea levels. And Exxon Mobil allegedly knew about climate change in 1977, back when it was still just Exxon and about 11 years before climate change became widely talked about.

Instead of acting on it, they started a decades-long misinformation campaign. According to Scientific American, Exxon helped create the Global Climate Coalition, which questioned the scientific basis for concern over climate change from the late '80s until 2002, and successfully worked to keep the US from signing the Kyoto Protocol, a move that helped cause India and China, two other massive sources of greenhouse gas, to avoid signing.

Even when Republican lawmakers show flashes of willingness to get something done, they're swiftly swatted down. There are myriad examples, but one example comes via *Dark Money*, where Mayer describes an incident

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in April 2010 when Lindsey Graham briefly tried to support a cap-and-trade bill: A political group called American Solutions promptly launched a negative PR campaign against him, and Graham folded after just a few days. American Solutions, it turns out, was backed by billionaires in fossil fuel and other industries, including Trump-loving casino magnate Sheldon Adelson.

In recent years, fossil-fuel companies have tried to cast themselves as being on the same side of the general public. Just this month, Exxon pledged \$1 million to fight for a carbon tax, a stopgap measure that charges a fee of \$40 per ton of carbon produced and increases as production goes up. At a glance, that may seem magnanimous, but the truth is that Exxon can *afford the tax*. Not only is the oil and gas industry experiencing a serious boom right now, companies know that the only real solutions to climate change will hurt them even more than a measly tax.

That's largely because there is no "free market" incentive to prevent disaster. An economic environment where a company is only considered viable if it's constantly expanding and increasing its production can't be expected to pump its own brakes over something as trivial as pending global catastrophe. Instead, market logic dictates that rather than take the financial hit that comes with cutting profits, it's more reasonable to find a way to make money off the boiling ocean.

Nothing illustrates this phenomenon better than the burgeoning climate-change investment industry. According to *Bloomberg*, investors are looking to make money off of everything from revamped food production to

hotels for people fleeing increasingly hurricane-ravaged areas. A top JP Morgan Asset investment strategist advised clients that sea-level rise was so inevitable that there was likely a lot of opportunity for investing in sea-wall construction.

Even today, after literally decades of radical libertarian billionaires fostering disbelief in climate change and skepticism about the government, three out of five Americans believe climate change affects their local community. That number climbs to two-thirds on the coasts. Even the Trump administration now admits that climate change is real, but their response to it is dead-eyed acceptance. If popular support actually influenced public policy, there would have been more decisive action from the US government years ago. But the fossil-fuel industry's interests are too well-insulated by the mountains of cash that have been converted into lobbyists, industry-shilling Republicans and Democrats, and misinformation. To them, the rest of the world is just kindling.

(*Luke Darby is a freelance writer living in Pittsburgh, USA.*)

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Budget 2019: Neither Interim, nor Substantial

C.P. Chandrasekhar

In a pre-election budget speech filled with propaganda about the supposed developmental achievements of the Narendra Modi government, acting finance minister Piyush Goyal read out a text that both window-dressed the revised estimates and violated all norms that should apply to an interim Budget.

Even while engaged in a desperate bid to win over the electorate, the government could not allow itself to deviate too much from its commitment to please international finance with a magic fiscal deficit figure in the neighbourhood of 3%.

The Goods and Services Tax (GST), which was supposed to be a game changer, has delivered Rs 1,00,000 crore less than budgeted, though the adverse effect of that falls substantially on the states.

The cash benefit transfer to farmers is expected to cost Rs 20,000 crore this year and Rs 75,000 crore in the coming year. Yet, the government claims it can keep the fiscal deficit at 3.4% of GDP in 2018–19, as compared to a budgeted 3.3%, and below the 3.5% recorded in 2017–18. In 2019–20, the finance minister expects the deficit to stay at 3.4%, despite the new expenditures.

A number of manipulations have helped the government keep to target despite adverse trends in receipts—or at least near it.

First is the “revision” of GDP estimates, which by consistently hiking the size of the national cake helps depress the ratio of the fiscal deficit to the GDP.

The second is optimistic estimates about tax buoyancy. Thus, the “projected” revenue from corporation taxes in 2018–19 is now placed at Rs 50,000 crore or 8% more than the budget estimates. Finally, the government is providing for large receipts of Rs 80,000 crore from disinvestment in 2018–19 and Rs 90,000 crore in 2019–20.

Finance Minister Jaitley had set his disinvestment target in Budget 2018–19 at Rs 80,000 crore. He was possibly expecting even larger realisations through measures that drained PSE surpluses, giving him much fiscal manoeuvrability in a pre-election year while achieving his fiscal deficit targets.

Eight out of 16 disinvestment transactions were “buybacks” of government-held equity by the PSUs concerned. Surprisingly, thus far there does not seem to be evidence of success. Excluding the

most recent buyback of equity by Indian Oil Corporation and ONGC, disinvestment receipts are currently placed at a little more than Rs 34,000 crore in 2018–19, which is not even halfway to the target.

The government also plans to mobilise in excess of Rs 10,000 crore by selling its 52.63% stake in the Rural Electrification Corporation to the Power Finance Corporation, which too it owns.

A shout-out to voters

Principally, the speech lays out three sets of changes on the expenditure side with the hope of winning votes at election time: to provide for a Rs 6,000-crore cash transfer in a year to “landholding” farmers with holding size up to 2 hectares, a contributory pension scheme for unorganised workers with monthly income up to Rs 15,000 and a set of direct tax concessions for those with taxable income less than Rs 5 lakh a year and for salary earners.

What is striking about these pre-election sops is not the gain which each beneficiary would register but the numbers who would feel that they have been benefited. The cash transfer to the farmer of Rs 6,000 a year amounts to Rs 500—or Rs 100 per capita for a family of five. That is nothing, as many farmers would recognise.

But since the scheme is expected to cover 12 crore landholders, the government obviously expects the sheer sweep would make a difference. It also requires allocating (even if not finally delivering as in the case of other schemes) an annual sum of Rs 75,000 crore.

What it, however, does not take into account, is possibly the fact that it has left the farming community and all dependent on

agriculture, languishing for the last four-plus years, and even accepted the Swaminathan Committee recommendation for a minimum support price of 150% above costs only in its last year in office. This sudden election-year concern for farmers will possibly not wash.

The same holds true for the pension scheme for unorganised workers. This is not for the existing elderly, but for those who register for the new scheme (Pradhan Mantri Shram-Yogi Maandhan) and keep paying a monthly contribution. A 29-year old would have to pay Rs 100 a month or Rs 1,200 a year for 30 years, till she turns 60, to be eligible for a pension of Rs 3,000 a month.

Even at a 5% inflation rate, Rs 3,000 after 30 years would amount to less than Rs 700 in today’s prices. Rather than play such games, a proper pension scheme should offer the elderly at least half the prevailing minimum wage and should be universal. That would be about Rs 5,000 per month today.

Finally, the enhanced exemption limit for taxation provides a zero tax concession for those with taxable income between Rs 2.5 lakh and Rs 5 lakh, without making much difference to other taxpayers. To compensate the salary earners for this neglect, the interim budget provides for an increase in the standard deduction for salary earners from Rs 40,000 to Rs 50,000.

Despite these concessions, income tax receipts are expected to remain unaffected relative to the budget estimates. As compared to a “projected” receipt of Rs 5,29,000 crore in 2018–19 (exactly the same as the budgeted estimate), the 2019–20 budget provides for an increase to Rs 6,20,000 crore. The concessions provided here are possibly not too

large in aggregate terms.

Put together, these meagre “sops” that were accompanied by thumping of desks and followed by “Modi, Modi” chants, are a pathetic effort to mobilise voter support at the last minute.

These features of the “interim budget” speak for themselves. This was, as expected, a propaganda effort, with no well thought out strategy or real intent.

Whether people, who were promised large transfers of expropriated money into their bank accounts and received nothing, will trust these promises is to be seen.

(C.P. Chandrasekhar is currently Professor at the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.)

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Modi's Startling Pre-Election Budget, Massaged by Creative Accounting

Jayati Ghosh

Let's get one thing clear. This is not an interim Budget, whatever the government finally agreed to call it. The sweeping promises made on both expenditure and taxation fronts are well beyond the limited minor changes that are supposed to be allowed in a vote-on-account or interim Budget.

For a government that officially has only a few months more to its tenure, this certainly crosses the borders of constitutional propriety. The Budget requires changes in the Finance Bill, which constitutionally should not be made by a departing government, and imposes substantial commitments on spending (like cash transfers to small farmers) and taxes (like income tax relief) on a future government.

Maybe we are now, unfortunately, in a world in which all of that does not matter anymore, and there is no one in any position of authority to call the government out on this. In any case, it is obvious that this is a pre-election Budget with a vengeance. However, as has been typical of the Modi government, the Budget speech operated more on the optics than on the actual spending allocations and tax changes, and sought to create a feel-good impression without enough real changes that could change the direction of the economy.

Take the biggest-ticket item, which was widely expected, but still startling in scope. The Budget speech declared that "vulnerable landholding farmer families, having cultivable land upto 2 hectares, will be provided direct income support at the rate of Rs 6,000 per year." This

is declared to benefit around 120 million small landowning families—presumably on the basis of the Agricultural Census of 2015–16 that identified around 12.5 crore operational holdings of less than 2 hectares. It will be paid in three instalments of Rs 2,000 each.

It is not clear whether the government actually intends to provide this cash transfer to all those with such holdings, even those without land titles, such as tenants and women farmers, and if so, how this is going to be implemented.

This matters, because clearly the government intends to start making such payments immediately in the current financial year, having allocated Rs 20,000 crore for this because the scheme will be implemented retrospectively from December 2018. It has set aside the fairly large amount of Rs 75,000 crore for such payments in 2019–20.

Whether it would actually benefit the Bharatiya Janata Party electorally remains to be seen, of course. The proposed transfer does not amount to much for individual households (a payment of Rs 500 per month per such household is quite small given the massive costs faced by farmers currently) and it does next to nothing to address the real economic problems of farmers today. The interest subvention extended to fisherfolk and livestock breeders is also only a small change.

But the income transfer would still amount to an injection of demand in the rural economy. Given the current depressed economic state

of rural India, that would certainly make a difference.

The other so-called "game changer" announced is that of the pension scheme for unorganised workers. But this turns out to be another jumla, of the kind that we should have got used to by now. The promise is only for a scheme that requires that young people working in unorganised activities (who are in their 20s, say) have to start paying their contributions regularly from today for the next 30 years or so in order to receive a pension of Rs 3,000 a month when they are more than 60 years old! This is a travesty of the actual requirement of universal pensions of around half the minimum wage that should be provided to all eligible adults by the government. As a promise based on long-term contributions, it also falls short of the Rs 3,000 per month being provided today as pension by the governments of Telangana and now Andhra Pradesh.

There are various benefits given to the middle class in terms of tax relief. But since these would kick in much later, it is not clear whether they would have an impact either in terms of increasing effective demand from such households today or would yield a political benefit for the ruling party.

The surprise is the lack of any effort to do something that would increase employment. In that sense this government continues to keep its head firmly in the sand about job creation (or the lack of it). Piyush Goyal's speech was replete with references to how various economic

activities must be creating jobs, but there has clearly been no official attention to what can be done about it.

The other important point to bear in mind is that—unfortunately—very few of these numbers can be taken seriously, which is a tragedy for the citizenry and also for any future government (even one headed by the same party). The fiscal or revenue deficit estimates as shares of GDP are already tainted by the unbelievable GDP numbers that have just been released by a Central Statistics Office that appears to have been tamed by the NITI Aayog, in an unprecedented involvement of political appointees in official data creation.

Meanwhile, the cynicism of the government about the spending that matters for citizens still continues. The revised estimate for spending on MNREGA is only Rs 61,000 crore—an amount that was already exhausted in December 2018—suggesting that the Central government plans no new spending on this in the coming months despite severe need for it across the country. This conforms to the pattern of pushing such dues on the next year, which has already hugely damaged the programme.

The Ayushman Bharat health programme, which was presented earlier as the “game changer” spent only Rs 2,400 crore while the planned spending for the coming year is only Rs 6,400 crore. The National Health Mission gets almost no increase in spending, while the flagship Swachh Bharat Abhiyan that is constantly invoked by the government spent Rs 865 crore less than budgeted for, and gets a further reduction in outlay for the coming year by Rs 4,228 crore to only Rs 12,750 crore.

But the budget numbers themselves have been massaged by creative accounting of a level that makes past governments look at mere amateurs at this game.

The revenues from disinvestment are significantly more than what should be expected given the receipts so far, which was already only because public sector undertakings (PSUs) were forced to buy shares in other PSUs.

The receipts from “IEBR” (Internal and Extra-Budgetary resources) at Rs 5,58,597 crore, are

Debate on Ram Temple

A New Temple, a New Mosque

Rajmohan Gandhi

Even as a five-judge bench of the Supreme Court seems ready to hear the case about the Ayodhya site where the Babri mosque (said to have been built in the 1520s) stood until its demolition in December 1992, the central government has asked the Court to release from its custody land surrounding the site so that the construction of a Ram temple can begin there. With good reason, this Ayodhya question has been linked to the general election that is due before May. The question should, however, be examined in a broader perspective. In fact, we should ask even at this late stage whether or not statesmanship and a spirit of give-and-take can produce a settlement.

The bare bones of a settlement are not hard to identify. One, the Hindu side admits the error in demolishing the mosque. Two, the Indian state admits its failure to prevent the demolition. Three, the Muslim side acknowledges the

a whopping Rs 1,73,766 crore more than the Budget estimates—and could only have been achieved by arm-twisting the now-pliant Reserve Bank of India, among other means.

This means that the aggregate macroeconomic impact of this Budget cannot really be assessed, since the actual fiscal stance is now so opaque. It's all smoke and mirrors, once again.

(Jayati Ghosh is professor of economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University.)

Hindu community's wish to see a Ram temple rise on the site as also the Hindu community's belief that a temple had once stood where the Babri Masjid was built. Four, not far from the site, and yet not too close to it, space for a new mosque is made available by the Hindu side and the Indian state. If necessary, the four steps can be simultaneous. In this dream-like scenario, acknowledgment of wrongdoing and restitution leads to justice as well as reconciliation.

Passions, politics and pressures may produce a Ram temple anyway, with or without a Supreme Court order. If such a temple emerges without an admission of the wrongfulness of the demolition, the Hindu-Muslim divide will deepen and Muslim fears will intensify. . . .

Will Ayodhya's disputing sides voluntarily come together as I have imagined? Very unlikely. But the Supreme Court can direct them to do so. We have to rebuild our society,

return it to some civility. We have to restore Hindu–Muslim relations. We have to become respectable in the world. Indians have to recover pride in their country’s lawfulness.

History’s facts cannot be scratched out. What happened in Ayodhya in the 1520s, in 1949, and in 1992 cannot be changed. But

yesterday’s follies can be admitted and consigned to the past. They should not be allowed to burn our todays and tomorrows.

A new temple and a new mosque rising as a result of a Supreme Court direction for justice and reconciliation would lift everyone’s spirits. At this testing time, the

Supreme Court may be in a position to add significantly to India’s peace and India’s honour.

(The writer, a grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, is research professor at the Centre for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Illinois.)

A Rotten Compromise

Apoorvanand

Rajmohan Gandhi wishes us to rebuild India, return it to some civility, and restore Hindu-Muslim relations. And he feels that unless the Ram temple issue is resolved, we cannot achieve this.

Like a festering wound, it has not let the nation be at peace for decades. He also treats it like a dispute, which has two competing parties and suggests that under the direction of the Supreme Court, the two can strike a compromise. The Hindu desire to see a magnificent Ram temple at the very site of the Babri masjid should be recognised by the Muslim side and it should cede ground for that. The Hindu side needs to acknowledge the “error” of demolition of the mosque and allow a masjid to come up “not too close” and yet “not too far” from the site.

Rajmohan Gandhi is not wrong when he says that for peace, some negotiation is required. We must compromise for peace, even if it means giving up justice to an extent. Should the Muslim side be so obstinate as to fail to admit a Hindu desire for a Ram temple at his birth place? Would the Hindus not be sagacious enough to allow a masjid at a place not far from the newly-constructed temple? But

the question is: Who represents the Hindu side—is it the Nirmohi Akhara or the Hindu Mahasabha? Or, is it the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, RSS and the BJP?

The years following the demolition of the Babri masjid have made it clear that the driving force behind the Ram Janmabhoomi campaign was political, couched in the language of the holy. It was admitted by the leader of the campaign, Lal Krishna Advani himself, that it was a political movement. So, it should be clear that it is not a Hindu desire but a political design using the Hindu as a cover.

Also, the symbolism behind the act of the demolition of the mosque cannot be missed. It was, essentially, an act of war against Muslims in which the Hindu might prevailed. The conceit and treachery of the act was justified by the Hindu maxim of achieving your objective: Sama Dama Danda Bheda. But even before that, the act of making a living mosque dead had many conspirators including the first chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Govind Ballabh Pant. He was emboldened by the support from Sardar Patel who thwarted all moves by Jawaharlal Nehru to get the mosque restored to its original

use by removing the idols placed in the mosque surreptitiously.

The story of Babri masjid, therefore, is a narrative comprising a series of compromises, by the state with the marauders, in the name of peace. It begins with the smuggling of the idols into the mosque in 1949 and continues till the permission of the Supreme Court was acquired for the gathering of lakhs of Hindus at the site of the mosque to do a symbolic kar seva.

A compromise for peace is justified. But, as Avishai Margalit warns us in his book, *On Compromise and Rotten Compromises*, we need to avoid rotten political compromises at all costs. We can easily see that the compromises done by the state have not led to any lasting peace, nor eased the pain caused to Muslims. The biggest rotten compromise involved the executive and the courts, which reduced the Muslims to helpless onlookers and targets of cruelty and humiliation. We also know that without 1992, 2002 would not have happened. By then, all atrocities against Muslims were treated as part of the protracted war on behalf of Ram against those who had forced him out of his birthplace.

The continuous erasure of all

“Muslim” influences, seen in the changing of names of Aurangzeb Road, Mughal Sarai and Allahabad is only a continuation of that war. It would be naïve to treat the Ram temple issue in isolation of what had happened before it and what continues after that.

A good compromise is one in which the stronger side recognises the weaker and gives a concession. A rotten compromise is one which makes subjugation, humiliation and cruelty towards the conceding side a permanent fixture.

To give in to the demand of a temple at that very spot would be a rotten compromise. Not only because of the rotten nature of its content, but also because it would mean compromising with a radical evil. Muslims recognise the radical nature of this evil which even well-intentioned souls like Rajmohan Gandhi tend to ignore, even if for the sake of peace.

The forces of this radical evil have made their intentions clear repeatedly—that the Ram temple is only a step towards establishing a majoritarian regime in India. To enter into an agreement with them would be to compromise the ethical foundations of what we know as the idea of India as a secular republic.

A stand-off or an impasse is better than this desperate rotten compromise, because that would mean that the evil can still be resisted.

(The writer teaches at Delhi University.)

Imran Khan and Minorities in Pakistan and India

Ram Puniyani

Imran Khan, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, seems to be unaware of the trajectory of state of minorities in Pakistan. While addressing a ceremony, Khan stated that his government would ensure that minorities in Pakistan get equal status and rights. Good intentions! At the same time he tried to criticize the state of Indian minorities. For Khan to talk of the state of minorities in India is like the pot calling the kettle black! While there is truth that in India the minorities are being relegated to ‘second class citizenship’, the state of minorities in Pakistan has been much worse by any standards.

Khan forgot that leave alone Hindus and Christians, who are ill treated there, even a sect of Islam, the Ahmadiyyas, are not recognized as Muslims and despite his wishes he could not retain Atif Mian, an outstanding economist, as a member of his Economic Advisory Council. He faced tremendous pressure of fundamentalists, the Maulanas, to expel him. These Maulanas exert a good deal of pressure on the politics in Pakistan. The Ahmadis have been persecuted a lot during last few decades. During my recent travel to Bangkok for an interfaith meeting, I happened to meet a number of Ahmadis, who had escaped from Pakistan and are seeking shelter and trying for citizenship in Thailand. India too has a significant Ahmadiyya population; while Indian law regards them as Muslims, they face some discrimination from fellow Muslims of other sects.

One recalls the fate of Aasiya Noorin, popularly referred to as Asia Bibi, who was convicted for blasphemy in 2010. Two Pakistan leaders who stood up in support of her, Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti and Punjab Governor, Salman Taseer, were assassinated. Their assassin was given a hero’s status. When the Supreme Court of Pakistan finally acquitted her on 31 October 2018, citing “material contradictions and inconsistent statements of the witnesses” that “cast a shadow of doubt on the prosecution’s version of facts”, there was a big agitation against the judgment. Islamic parties led these protests, which took place in several major cities of the country. Imran Khan tried to negotiate with fundamentalists, but could not prevail upon them to withdraw their protests. They filed a review petition in the Supreme Court, which was rejected by the Court on January 29, 2019. Despite this, Asia Bibi continues to face death threats, and is presently in hiding in Pakistan under government security; newsreports say that Canada has offered her asylum, but it is not sure when she will be allowed to leave the country.

The plight of Hindus and Christians in Pakistan has been abysmal all through. Forcible conversion and abduction of Hindu girls, and restrictions on religious practices of Hindus and Christians have been common there. The regular repetitive violence against these minorities is horrific. Pakistan did begin with the 11th August Constituent Assembly speech of

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Mohammad Ali Jinnah. He urged forgiveness of bygone quarrels among Pakistanis, so all can be “first, second and last a citizen of this State with equal rights . . .” Pointing out that England in the past centuries had settled its fierce sectarian persecutions, he proposed that “in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State.” Brilliant formulation!

This principle was not to last long. Even during Jinnah’s own life time, the communal elements around him started asserting, and after his death the ground was all theirs. Democracy there was jeopardized time and again. Passing through many dictatorial regimes, with spells of democracy in between, finally Pakistan declared itself Islamic Republic of Pakistan in 1973, and later when Zia Ul Haq took over the reins of Pakistan, the process of Islamization of Pakistan further accelerated. Shariat Courts were established, prominence was given to Islamic clergy and with this the plight of minorities went further downhill. What Pakistan shows is that the process of ‘other-ing’ is unending. This process began with exclusion of Hindus and Christians, went on towards ‘other-ing’ of Ahmadiyyas, and now even a major sect of Islam, the Shias, is being ‘other-ed’

Till recently, the situation of minorities in India was not comparable to that in Pakistan. With an impeccably secular Constitution, and under the leadership of Gandhi–Nehru, India stood on the solid foundations of pluralism. Pakistan, interestingly even could not stay

together as a single nation. It broke up with Bangladesh separating from it due to many reasons, one of them being imposition of Urdu as the national language. This is a lesson for all, if at all one is needed, that religion cannot be the foundation of a democratic state.

However, in India too, over the last three decades, communal violence has gradually been on the rise and the minorities are facing marginalisation. Post-partition, for the first few decades, the country remained relatively free from incidents of communal violence. But since the 1980s, the incidents of communal riots have risen steadily. Communal violence against Muslims peaked in the 1990s, following the demolition of the Babri Masjid. It first resulted in the carnage in Mumbai, then was followed by the genocide in Gujarat in 2002, and later there took place the horrifying violence in Muzzafarnagar. Anti-Christian violence began in the

decade of 1990s, leading first to the horrific murder of Pastor Graham Staines in 1999 and later the carnage in Kandhamal in 2008.

In the wake of the Babri Masjid demolition, the Pakistani poet Fahmida Riaz wrote a moving poem, *Tum Bilkul Hum Jaise Nikle* (You Turned Out to Be Just Like Us). Imran Khan’s ambition of giving better status to the already denigrated minorities is laudable. But can he succeed with the Mullahs and the military breathing down his neck? India had a better record of dealing with minorities, but now, here too, their conditions have taken a turn for the worse. Let’s hope the right thinking people of both communities will come together to reverse this situation in the near future.

(Ram Puniyani is a former professor of biomedical engineering and former senior medical officer affiliated with the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay.)

Terrifying Assessment of a Himalayan Melting

Kunda Dixit

While the global media’s attention is on the Greenland ice sheet, the Arctic and eastern Antarctica, a landmark report released this week shows that the Himalaya will face catastrophic meltdown during this century if there is no immediate effort to reduce the world’s carbon emissions.

The voluminous 627-page report titled *Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment: Climate Change, Sustainability and People* put together by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) states that

even in the best-case scenario, the Himalayan mountains will lose more than one-third of their ice by the end of the century. An earlier report was even scarier, it said the Mt Everest region would lose 90% of its ice by 2100.

But that would happen only if global average temperatures can be capped at a 1.5°C increase above pre-industrial levels. Most scientists agree that target is unlikely to be met. If current emission trends continue, the world will actually be hotter by between 4.2–6.5°C by 2100—in which case two-thirds of

Himalayan glaciers will be gone.

Himalayan peaks are warming between 0.3 to 0.7°C faster than the global average, and the loss of Himalayan ice would have devastating consequences for 1.6 billion people living in the mountains and downstream countries. Climate models show that summer flow in the Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra and their snow-fed tributaries will actually rise till 2050 as the glaciers melt away, but will start decreasing after that because there will be no more ice left. Measurements show that glaciers in the Central and Eastern Himalaya are shrinking at 40 cm/year, and some are receding up to 30 m/year.

After the controversy surrounding a 2007 report by the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate change (IPCC) that predicted all Himalayan glaciers would be gone by 2035, scientists have been much more careful in making similarly wild predictions. Which is why ICIMOD deployed 210 scientists from 20 countries in this five-year study to assess the latest knowledge from peer-reviewed journal findings.

The new assessment is only slightly less alarming. Although the timeframe has been pushed back to the end of the century there is still very little time to fix the problem even if global carbon emissions are cut in the coming decades. So, we know what the problem is and we know the solution. What are we going to do about it?

ICIMOD Director David Molden has anticipated that question. He said at the report's launch in Kathmandu on Monday: "This is not just going to be another book on the shelf. We hope to spark policy dialogue by putting climate action on the political agenda by putting the state

of the knowledge in one place."

The assessment is a unique scientific partnership between ICIMOD's member countries, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma, China, India and Nepal. The Centre is now spearheading an effort to set up a Himalayan Council, much like the Arctic Council which is working on the north polar region.

The concerns of the world's mountain regions and the amplified impact of global warming on the world's mountains were mentioned only tangentially in the last two IPCC report. This assessment, in which IPCC scientists also took part, is expected to put the Himalayan region firmly on the global agenda as well.

The hydro-meteorological impact of climate change will go beyond countries like Nepal or Bhutan. Heavily populated and rapidly developing downstream areas of China, Southeast Asia, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh will face severe water crisis. And then there is the indirect impact of the warming on weather and monsoons, as simulations show increased frequency of droughts and floods.

Himalayan countries have always struggled against poverty, marginalisation, state neglect, inequality, discrimination, out-migration, and these problem predate climate change. What global warming does is make all the existing structural problems worse.

For example, the assessment shows that half the children living in Himalayan villages are undernourished. Nepal's national poverty rate is 23%, but 42% of the country's mountain dwellers are poor. Because they have fewer choices, the poorest are already beginning to suffer from erratic

weather and other impacts of climate change, adding to the push-factors in outmigration.

The report also lays out policy options for countries in the Himalayas, which include increased cross border cooperation among them to battle common threats. One concrete step would be China, Nepal and India cooperating on disaster early warning on future Glacial Lake Outburst Floods. The report also calls for added investment in meeting the UN's Sustainable Development Goal targets which would build resilience among mountain peoples by giving them more options to adapt.

Two of ICIMOD's member countries, China and India, are both suffering the impact of climate change along their common mountain frontier. Together, the two giants are the biggest emitters of greenhouse gases in the world. It no longer makes sense now to talk only about adapting to climate change, Himalayan countries need to also start mitigating their carbon emissions and switching to renewables.

They need to do this not just to save the Planet, but to also save their fossil-fuel dependent economies and diversifying their energy mix towards renewables.

(Courtesy: Nepali Times)

Madhu Dandavate

By

B. Vivekanandan

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Janata Trust

D-15, Ganesh Prasad,
Naushir Bharucha Marg,
Grant Road (W),
Mumbai 400 007.

What We Sow Is What We Eat

Michael D. Yates

I am lying in a meadow high in the Rocky Mountains. The sun is warm and comforting. I watch the clouds, puffy white in the blue sky, but soon pull a cap over my eyes and enter that state where thoughts swirl through your head and you don't know if you're sleeping or not.

While I rest, Karen is looking for wild strawberries. She has a remarkable eye for them, and has found the delicate plants everywhere from along the ocean in Nova Scotia to the volcanic highlands of the Big Island in Hawai'i. She remembers as she is searching the hard labour of picking the tiny berries as a girl, gathering enough for her mother to make jelly. No easy task as I have learned when she finds a patch big enough for me to collect some too.

When all you have ever eaten are the overly large and often woody and tasteless strawberries sold in grocery stores, putting a wild one in your mouth is a revelation. A gift from the earth, sweet, tart, wonderful, perfect. They leave your fingers smelling like, well, strawberries.

We've found many fruits on our hikes. Strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, cherries sweet and sour, currants, huckleberries, apples, plums, even liliko'i (passion fruit), guava, lemons, and limes. Some like the berries grow wild. Others have flourished long after they were planted and then abandoned.

Seeing and tasting these gifts of nature can't help but make you think of the foods most of us eat. Heavily processed and full of salt, hydrogenated oil, and high fructose corn syrup; loaded with chemicals;

laden with pesticides; grown on factory farms; treated like any other mass-produced products, aimed for the market with costs per unit low and profits high. Our crops are planted and harvested in this country by a largely black and brown workforce, poorly paid and forced to live in shacks and tents. They are poisoned, along with their children, every day they labour, and their life expectancy, in the United States, is barely fifty years. What it was when Edward R. Murrow's documentary, *Harvest of Shame*, was shown on television in 1960. Much the same can be said about farm labourers anywhere in the world.

Literally underlying the production of food is soil, that "mixture of minerals, organic matter, gases, liquids, and countless organisms that together support life on Earth." Food requires soil and labour, and as should be obvious, our relationship to the soil has always been a feature of human existence. For most of our time on earth, we have connected to the soil in an integral and sustaining way, taking care of it so that we could continue to harvest its gifts. We learned as we produced our sustenance, and developed greater understanding of how the earth yielded its bounties. While we made mistakes that sometimes led to disaster, we lived in relative harmony with the soil and all of the natural world.

Given our past, more than 100,000 years, it is astonishing that today, with our scientific knowledge, technological prowess, and wealth, we squander soil with reckless

abandon. We devote less and less of it to food production and more and more to mega cities, endless suburbs, and exurbs. Of the land presumably reserved for farming, we grow soybeans and corn for animal feed and biofuels. In the Global South, peasants are losing their land to rich speculators, who hold large acreages idle in anticipation of price increases. Everywhere we cut down trees, build huge dams, allow agriculture to contaminate the air, water, and earth. We have so degraded the soil that it has lost its material elasticity, its ability to thrive and regenerate, which means that like an overstretched rubber band, it can never be restored to full health. The natural harmony that once defined humanity has disappeared. The awe with which we embraced the earth, the love we once felt for the land, has been replaced by arrogance, a hubris declaring that we can do what we please, and if the soil doesn't like it, too bad for it.

Our treatment of the earth, of the dirt beneath our feet, is directly connected to our system of food production. The pollutants we put in the soil show up in our groceries. And the entire wretched business of agriculture derives from the nature of our economic system, which compels every giant corporation, every "entrepreneur," to grow, to compete, to consider everything and everyone a commodity. Buy cheap, sell dear. These are the words that drive all of life.

There is no end to the propaganda denying this. Green Revolutions, GMO seeds, endless advertisements

(even Tyson claims to be producing organic chicken in an ad that would make you think that this company is a steward of the earth), misleading reports from Non-Government Organizations and the major global financial entities like the IMF and the World Bank. If we were to take the hype as truth, we would conclude that the world has never been more productive, healthier and happier.

However, reality is considerably different. Modern food production has failed utterly. At least a billion people worldwide are undernourished. Agriculture adds significantly to global warming, and it wreaks havoc on nature's metabolism. Recent evidence suggests that as CO2 levels rise, major food commodities contain more sugar and fewer nutrients, very likely leading to more obesity and poorer health.

Corporate agriculture also reinforces the marked increase in income and wealth inequality evident in almost every nation. Those with means get decent nourishment and enjoy good health; those without have neither. Those who grow the food suffer; those who sell it get rich. Making matters worse, those with power tell us that the only remedy for the problems to which they will admit, is more of the same. More chemicals, more GMOs, more mechanisation, more land consolidation.

It doesn't have to be this way. We already know how to treat the soil with respect, producing organically, on relatively small farms, utilising techniques of land management that are in harmony with a sustainable environment. We know, from examples around the world, especially in Cuba, how to feed urban populations with food

grown in the cities themselves. There are food cooperatives, run democratically and non-capitalistically, that combine food production and distribution, serving local communities. We know how to conduct socially useful research that will show what works and what does not. If the will were there, we could greatly reduce global warming.

As we did these things, we would become more aware of the necessity for closing the ecological rifts that now threaten our existence, mainly the rift between town and country that has shaped the modern world, with destitute rural areas on the one hand and mega-cities on the other. Our actions would in turn shape our consciousness and help us build an ever more communal world.

It is one thing to say what needs to be done, and another to believe that it will happen. It is probably easier to imagine the sun growing cold and the solar system dying than it is to be sanguine that humanity will do the right thing. All I can do is try to tell the truth. And remember the wild strawberries, in the hope, vain though it may be, that someday the earth will smell, taste, and feel as alive as it once was.

Addendum

There are many people, including on the left, who believe that modern industrial agriculture provides us with healthy food and is absolutely necessary if we are to solve any food crisis. They should take a trip through California's Central Valley and take a few deep breaths. Or enjoy a look at the horrendous cattle pens along US-80 in Nebraska (an interstate highway in the USA). Go to a town where there is a chicken processing plant and ask to take a tour. You won't be allowed to do

so, but you will probably be ready to puke from the foul odour some time before you get to the facility. Complete your journey by taking a look at one of the large waste ponds at an industrial hog "farm." Read something about farm-raised fish. If industrial agriculture is essential for humanity's future existence, then we are in more trouble than we know.

(The writer is the Editorial Director of Monthly Review Press.)

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Venezuela Defines the Future of the Region

Claudio Katz

Guaidó's self-proclamation as Venezuelan president is the most ridiculous and dangerous coup attempt in recent years. With the shameless backing of Washington, the Venezuelan rightwing intends to place a complete stranger at the helm of the state.

This time around, the starting signal was neither a terrorist attack nor an assassination attempt directed against Maduro. Trump has chosen a group of conspiracy experts (Abrams, Pence, Bolton, Rubio) to pursue escalation and has opted to seize the Venezuelan oil enterprise operating in the United States (CITGO). He has brushed aside all principles of legal guarantee in his quest to appropriate the world's largest concentration of crude oil reserves.

South America's rightwing governments have their own motives for supporting the coup. Colombia's Duque wants to do away with the Peace Accords signed with the guerrillas, after having dismantled UNASUR. A contingent of the US Marines already stationed in Colombia is prepared for any sort of provocation.

Brazil's Bolsonaro continues to identify Venezuela with the blight of "populism". That rhetorical gesture is meant to paper over his largely improvised presidential debut and forestall the inevitable disappointment of his electors.

Macri leads the line in the crusade against Venezuela. The Argentine head of state is eager to show that his administration can be

the most able servant of the empire, going so far as to designate one of his own party officials as Guaidó's ambassador. The president has reserved special exemption for Venezuelan immigrants in the midst of a wave of xenophobia whose ultimate purpose is to distract from runaway inflation, unemployment and utility hikes. For the Macri administration, the Venezuelan crisis has the additional benefit of dividing the opposition, where leaders of federal Peronism join the President in vilifying Venezuela.

Without the backing of the United States, Duque, Bolsonaro and Macri are completely ineffective. The so-called "Lima Group" could not even boycott Maduro's swearing-in. There were more foreign delegations present at the ceremony than at the investiture of the raving Brazilian military captain.

Meanwhile, Venezuela's atomised opposition is clinging to a fictional president. It has never managed to win a presidential election and failed in every attempt to contest election results. It has unflinchingly accepted the United States' veto of negotiations with Chavismo, and it periodically likes to plunge into brutal acts of violence. For the time being it is a simple marionette of the State Department, subject to the whimsies of Trump the puppeteer.

Double Standards

The Caribbean coup leaders have become media darlings. They draw on the complicity of journalists,

attributing to Maduro a litany of sins that also happen to be extensive to other governments throughout the region. A cursory overview of these similarities would show the plot to be completely unjustified, or, alternatively, would force a call for a continent-wide regime change.

The Venezuelan government is repeatedly characterised as illegitimate, as if it were the product of electoral fraud. But the reality is that the Maduro government was confirmed with the participation of 67% of the population, a level well beyond recent poll numbers registered in Chile or Colombia. No journalist thought to call for the ousting of Chile's Piñera or Colombia's Duque on the basis of low voter turnout.

It is true that one sector of the opposition called for abstention, yet another did participate in elections and did not contest the outcome. Nor was there ever any evidence of fraud in an electoral system praised by international organisations (Carter) and political figures (Zapatero). The very same electoral mechanism awarded the opposition with leadership of the National Assembly in 2015. Operating within the same electoral framework, Maduro is protested and Guaidó is recognised.

Twenty four elections have been held over the last two decades of the Chavista regime, each one allowing for a recall vote. The right to a recall does not exist in any other country throughout the region. Voting is not obligatory (as is the case in many Latin American countries), and yet

Venezuelan elections routinely show levels of voter participation above the regional average. The opposition never acknowledges defeat and always appeals to accusations of voter fraud when the results do not go their way.

With their habitual duplicity, the same journalists and media who criticise Venezuelan elections do not find anything suspect about the commission of elections in Brazil while Lula sits in jail. They dispute the rulings of the Venezuelan judicial system while extolling on the virtues of the magistrate who brought down Lula (Moro). Nor do they object to his ministerial appointment by Bolsonaro.

Likewise, the media denounces the detention of opposition leaders (Carmona, Ledesma, López) but fails to mention the cause of their imprisonment. They are not in prison for their critical opinions; they are there for fomenting coup attempts or for their involvement in bloody guarimba street fighting. Chavismo is subject to a level of scrutiny that applies nowhere else in Latin America. Where Venezuela is concerned, it would seem that we should be more understanding of such attempts at regicide.

Nor does the media care to mention the brutal violation of human rights practiced by Venezuela's opponents. Since the signing of the Peace Accords, Colombian paramilitaries acting under the watchful eye of the government have murdered hundreds of social leaders. Political prisoners in Argentina are mounting and there is a cloak of impunity protecting those responsible for the murder of Santiago Maldonado and Rafael Nahuel (one, a solidarity activist with indigenous causes, the other,

a member of Argentina's Mapuche community). Brazil has seen an escalation in attacks against the Landless Workers' Movement (MTS), and recent findings have implicated the sons of Bolsonaro in the murder of PSOL politician Marielle Franco.

Chavismo is even accused of maintaining imaginary connections with drug traffickers. But the same groups levelling those accusations have overlooked the very real financial backing by organised crime for the Colombian rightwing. No international organisation has called for punishing that country as it continues to harbour the production of illegal drugs. What has taken place in Mexico is even more serious. The entire Mexican territory has been torn apart by a massacre claiming some 200,000 lives, without so much as a suggestion of regional intervention from the Organisation of American States.

Venezuela is of course experiencing a massive wave of emigration as a consequence of its economic troubles. But comparable forms of displacement have also been observed under similar circumstances in other countries. Poverty always leads those most affected to seek refuge in a neighbouring country.

If these catastrophes amount to a "humanitarian crisis", it would be fitting to say the same of equivalent migrations elsewhere. No one is speaking in those terms of the harrowing flight of Central American families to North America. Their torments are apparently not worthy of pious calls for aid. Instead, they are the excuse for the construction of a border wall. The internal war in Colombia saw similar levels of human displacement without any

call for foreign intervention.

Media conglomerates always frame their coverage of Venezuela with allegations of the violation of the freedom of press. But the disruptions they portray are irrelevant next to the systematic murder of journalists in Mexico and other Central American countries. The manufacturers of lies tend to apply a double standard to their own practices.

Contradictions Below the Surface

It suffices to recall what took place in Iraq and Libya to have some sense of the stakes involved. Imperialism is capable of wreaking unimaginable havoc. If a large-scale intervention should take place, Latin America will lose one of its major safeguards against the kind of catastrophe visited on Africa and the Middle East.

The Venezuelan rightwing dismisses the dangers involved, expecting a rapid victory with little collateral damage. It is already announcing the imminent retreat of Chavismo, Maduro's isolation and the desertion of the military's top ranks. It likes to point to the unity among its own ranks and the international support behind it. But these are tall tales that unravel under the most superficial analysis.

The command center in Washington is compromised by a number of dissenting voices, while Trump is preoccupied by a complex political-legal challenge on the home front. Fiascos in the Middle East have put a damper on enthusiasm for foreign military incursions. The military is disoriented, recently having withdrawn troops from Syria and Afghanistan. The possibility of a repeat of the Granada or Panama occupations has been discarded, and the typical pre-invasion ultimatum,

like that offered to Hussein or Gadhafi, is being postponed. The Pentagon is only entertaining limited engagements for the time being, starting with the shoddy pretext of humanitarian intervention.

Nor are the US's European partners eager to participate in adventurism. Their role in the plot against Venezuela lacks a credible threat. Divergences among Western leaders has led to an impasse over the agreement on sanctions in the Organisation of American States and the UN, while the Vatican seeks to remain neutral.

Coup conspirators have also taken note of the augmented role Russia plays in supplying the Venezuelan military. A Russian presence could complicate matters for Trump's oil seizures, if it proves to be the case that Russia has shares in CITGO. Nor is it clear who would exactly be most affected by the seizure. Experts estimate that the United States has managed to separate its supply of Venezuelan oil. But those purchases make up 13% of imports and their cancellation could affect energy prices.

The media is at pains to conceal these dilemmas. Coverage is triumphalist, despite the failure on the part of the rightwing to register any type of achievement in the last two weeks. So long as bribes, threats and US enticements fail to erode the Armed Forces, Guaidó will continue to exercise command of a nonexistent post.

A Battle on Two Fronts

The rightwing has indeed recovered its capacity to mobilise, but Chavismo has responded in kind with equally massive demonstrations. The government maintains a remarkable ability to

rally its supporters in the midst of the crisis. Both sides recognise that repeated marches will not be enough to force the government to relinquish power. The indeterminacy of the current situation could ultimately prove costly for the opposition.

Their leaders are left to choose between the path of violence (which led to their isolation in 2017) or accepting the status quo (which is sapping their energies). For the time being they have opted against the violent guarimbas in the wealthier neighborhoods, preferring to test their strength through provocations in popular neighbourhoods.

The government too has learned from past confrontations and is exercising caution. It shows leniency towards Guaidó's photo ops and is betting on his slow demoralisation. But economic collapse raises questions about long-term popular support in the battle against the rightwing. All of Venezuelan society is being torn apart by the collapse of income.

Contraction in production over the last five years has destroyed 30% of GDP. Such a downturn is on level with the 1930's Great Depression. No sector of Venezuelan society is immune to the debacle.

Crude oil extraction has been halved. Monetary financing of the fiscal deficit has triggered the largest hyperinflationary spiral of the twenty-first century. Price indexes leapt from 300% (2016) to 2,000% (2017). The current price average is unquantifiable.

The scale of the crisis is demolishing salaries, leading to barter exchange and a critical shortage of food and medicine. The daily suffering of the population is appalling, their survival often

dependent on official government supply networks.

The media portrays this collapse as the inexorable consequence of "Chavista populism", overlooking the role played by the architects of economic warfare. The foreign blockade and internal sabotage have led to a collapse in crude oil extraction, diminishing international reserves and skyrocketing costs of basic imports. Foreign and local capitalists have provoked this collapse as a means to expedite the arrival of a more business-friendly political regime.

Indescribable economic adversity has been aggravated by the government's own improvisations, ineffectiveness and outright complicity. Maduro has passively tolerated the destruction of production. Sectors of Chavismo have lobbied to penalise corrupt bureaucrats and their millionaire partners, to no avail.

These are the initiatives needed to forestall economic collapse. Other measures proposed include effective control over the banking system to impede capital flight, radical shifts in the assignation of foreign reserves to the private sector, progressive taxation of private fortunes, incentive programs to encourage local production of food and measures to generate popular control of prices.

This program also calls for a new approach to debt that would anchor the local currency and contain hyperinflation. No "petro" or "sovereign bolivar" will function so long as the boliburguesía [portmanteau of Bolivarian and bourgeoisie, i.e. the new bourgeoisie that prospered under the Chavez administration] enjoys official government protection. This

privileged layer has thrived by over-billing imports, transferring funds abroad, engaging in currency speculation and scarcity. The rightwing is not the only force looking to topple Chavismo; similar forces are alive inside a government that has failed to counteract economic collapse.

Commitment or Neutralism

As the conflict grows more serious, many voices are calling to impose a set of conditions under which the Venezuelans could democratically determine their future. The legitimacy of that principle is beyond debate. The question is how it can be implemented, because if the coup forces take the upper hand then that aspiration will be as good as dead. The continued sovereignty of the country and the defense of popular rights demand, above all, that the escualidos be defeated [escualido, “the squalid,” is a common pejorative for the anti-Chavista opposition].

The conflict underway is no longer an “internal affair” of Venezuela. The confrontation exceeds its territorial origin and now involves the entire region. The two principal interests stoking the crisis have very precise goals. The United States looks to recover dominion over its “backyard”, while the Latin American elites want to bury the previous decade’s popular demands.

If the coup conspirators manage to defeat Chavismo, they will move next on Bolivia and Cuba, extending neoliberal authoritarianism across the continent. The dispute over Venezuela is about the preservation of one of the last breakwaters as the reactionary tidal wave continues to expand.

The parties, organisations and

intellectuals who categorically reject the coup are capable of grasping the dimensions of the dilemma. The strength of anti-imperialist demonstrations underlines this. Gone is the hesitancy that watched on from the sidelines during the 2017 guarimbas. The designs of an ascendant rightwing are all too plain to see; the portents of a Venezuelan Bolsonaro would mean irreparable damage.

The current dilemma should in no way deter criticism of the decisions made by the Chavista government. But it is of vital importance to situate any critique within a shared battle against the putschists.

Moreover, the current struggle calls for something more than the ambiguous neutrality expressed in recent pronouncements. By distancing themselves from the conflict’s protagonists, those declarations situate either side on a common plane. With the same yardstick they question Maduro and Guaidó, suggesting that there is a shared level of illegitimacy. They simultaneously criticise the regime’s authoritarianism and the adventurism of the opposition. They object to the US military threat and the geopolitical presence of Russia.

But does a mutual condemnation of Maduro and Guaidó then entail recognising neither party? A call for abstention from the rallies marshalled by the government and the opposition? Does it mean an indiscriminate censure of the Marines and the Bolivarian Army?

Neutralists praise the attitude of the Mexican and Uruguayan governments, who are advocating for the immediate renewal of negotiations between both parties. That initiative has opened a channel of dialogue which Maduro has

already accepted, and Guaidó rejects.

It is clear that the concrete specifics of negotiation will be decided by the outcome of the struggle. The rightwing will not accept dialogue so long as there is a perceived possibility that it can seize power. Therefore, defeating the Right is the basic condition for resuming negotiations. The outcome of negotiations will be a reflection of the balance of forces. Defeating the rightwing is the categorical priority for the present moment. In that battle, the destiny of Latin America is being decided.

[Claudio Katz is an economist and researcher with the National Council of Scientific and Technical Research (Argentina).]

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Yellow Vests and Red Unions Strike Together

Richard Greeman

On February 5, as the Macron government pushed harsh repressive laws against demonstrators through the National Assembly, the Yellow Vests joined with France's unions for the first time in a day-long, nation-wide "General Strike."

At the very moment when in Paris the lower house was voting to implement Macron's proposed laws designed to suppress public demonstrations (a legal right protected in both the French Constitution and the U.N. Human Rights Declaration), tens of thousands of their constituents were out in the streets all over the country demonstrating and striking against Macron's authoritarian, neo-liberal government. The demonstrators' demands ranged from better salaries and retirement benefits, restoration of public services, equitable tax codes, an end to police brutality, and banning the use of "flash-balls" on demonstrators, to Macron's resignation and the installation of participatory democracy.

Deaf to the angry people's legitimate grievances, unwilling to deal with them, Macron has given himself no other choice than to legislate new repressive legal restrictions to suppress their continued free expression. This resort to open repression can only serve to discredit the government's handling of a crisis largely of his own making, treating a spontaneous social movement among the 99% as if it were a terrorist or fascist conspiracy. The unpopular President's repressive tactics will

inevitably backfire on him. The French are extremely jealous of their liberties, and Macron's monarchical arrogance can only remind them of how their ancestors dealt with Louis XVI.

Moreover, the Yellow Vests, who have been a painful thorn in Macron's side since last November, were now demonstrating together with the French labour unions, whom he thought he had tamed last Spring. This convergence came in response to a call for a one-day "General Strike" issued by the CGT and Solidaires, who for the first time invited "any Yellow Vests who felt like it" to join. In the event, quite a few did feel like it, despite the CGT's previous hostility to the Yellow Vests and despite their own fundamental suspicion of all "representative" structures, like established parties and unions (whom the Yellow Vests justifiably fear would attempt to coopt them, speak in their name, and sell them out).

A Day of Action and Convergence

For a "first date" the one-day Strike came off very well, somewhat to the surprise of both parties. And if this tentative Red-Yellow alliance continues to solidify (and there is every indication that it will) France will likely become ungovernable and the ruling classes will be up against the wall. What might happen next is rich in possibility, for the French, with their long history of popular revolutions, have been singularly inventive in coming up with new political arrangements. For now, let us look more closely at what may in

retrospect be an historic day.

The Strike began at exactly midnight when a rowdy crowd of 200-300 demonstrators near Paris blocked the giant Rungis produce market, cutting off food to the capital with trucks lining up outside. They even set up a barricade. In the early hours there were also blockages at the airport of Nantes and at the University there. All told there were demonstrations in at least 160 different localities, all different in size and conduct, mostly improvised by people on the spot at the last minute. There were big ones in the Channel ports Le Havre, Rouen and Caen. In Strassbourg about 1,500, in Lyon 5,000 including 500 Yellow vests. In Marseille the Yellow Vest march converged with the CGT at the Stock Exchange, a shift of targets for the Yellow Vests from government to finance capital.

In Paris, the CGT-led strikers invaded the fancy Right Bank territory, marching boldly up the Rue de Rivoli with its luxurious shop-windows. They then held an impromptu rally at a major intersection, tying up traffic and baffling the police.

Who Are these Yellow Vests?

Since November 17, 2018, the popular, nation-wide, self-organised Yellow Vests movement has been keeping up the pressure on the neo-liberal Macron regime with daily protests at traffic circles and weekly demonstrations in dozens of cities. It is made up of average, lower middle-class French people, mostly

provincials, whose lives have gotten worse under neo-liberal policies. They are mostly “little people” who are struggling to make ends meet and are tired of being ignored and humiliated by France’s elites.

The Yellow Vests represent a demographic cross section of France—minus the top 2% or 3%. And, unfortunately, for the moment, minus the 10% (?) of France’s doubly oppressed, discriminated immigrant communities—the Arabs, Berbers, Black Africans and other immigrants who do most of the dirty jobs.

Coming from many different backgrounds, the Yellow Vests wisely chose to put aside their political differences and party preferences, avoid pointless arguments, and focus on the struggle that unites them, each speaking for her or himself (alternating genders to maintain parity). As the weekly protests continued, the Yellow Vests were slowly refining their goals and tactics and discovering how to organise themselves while retaining their autonomy. After more than two months, on January 25–27, delegates from 75 local Yellow Vest Assemblies came together in the town of Commercy (Lorraine) for their first “Assembly of Assemblies” and wrote a democratic, egalitarian, anti-racist Declaration (discussed below) which soon achieved a consensus around the country. So a functioning federation with common goals is now emerging.

Remarkably, the Yellow Vests’ rebellion has persisted week after week despite a government campaign of brutal police repression—including thousands of injuries (some serious), several deaths, a thousand arrests, and routine tear-gassing of peaceful groups.

The Yellow Vests have persisted despite being constantly vilified by the government and media as fascists, violent terrorists, “a hate-filled mob” (Macron), etc. Yet, amazingly, according to the latest polls, 77% of French people think their mobilisation is “justified” (up from 74% in January).

Most remarkable of all, they have wrung some actual concessions from Macron, who, after disdainfully declaring he would “never” give in to an unruly mob, was forced to rescind the tax on diesel fuel that the movement had originally crystallised around, and promised a raise in the minimum wage and a cut in taxes on retirement income (both of which turned out to be shams on close examination).

These practical victories, won by an autonomous group that refuses to anoint leaders or to negotiate, have deeply embarrassed the French labour movement and particularly the “militant” CGT (General Confederation of Labour, historically affiliated with the French Communist Party) which, after months of stop-and-go strikes last Spring, failed to block the implementation of Macron’s neo-liberal “reforms,” which took away many benefits won by French labour during the great struggles of the past.

The defeated strikers returned to work last September with their tails between their legs, simmering mad; and it was out this void of active opposition to Macron’s ongoing neo-liberal offensive that the Yellow Vests spontaneously emerged and spread across the country, with their spectacular direct action tactics. Many union members, more or less disgusted with their leaders, joined the Yellow Vests from the start. The Yellow Vests

organised themselves via Facebook pages, socialised in traffic circles and parking lots and grew into an autonomous social movement. They stood up for themselves and for the rest of France’s working poor, unemployed, single mothers, and retired people. They spontaneously organised mass civil disobedience, successfully opposing Macron’s economic program of taking from the poor and giving to the rich (from whose soft white hands the wealth will theoretically “trickle down”).

The CGT

The immediate response to the rise of the Yellow Vests on the part of the CGT and its leader, the unsmiling, mustachioed Martinez, was suspicion (‘petty-bourgeois fascists?’) and hostility. Martinez and the other union bureaucrats could not help seeing the Yellow Vests as competitors, and thus as a threat to their own hegemonic status as official representatives of the workers—especially after Macron’s “concessions.”

After shocking reports of police violence unleashed by Macron’s government against the Yellow Vests’ third Saturday demonstration, and in direct response to an appeal for calm from Macron, on December 6, the leaders of the CGT and all the other labour federations except for Solidaires, signed a Déclaration of solidarity—not of solidarity with the injured and arrested demonstrators, but with the Macron government, the alleged representative of the “peaceful republican order!” In return for what many described as a “betrayal”, the labour movement’s clique of professional negotiators accepted Macron’s invitation to “resume the social dialogue”—that is to allow them to sit at the table

with him and negotiate more give-backs of workers' rights.

The union leadership's pledge of allegiance to the neo-liberal flag did not go down well in the union ranks. And so the very next day, Martinez and the other union leaders spun in the wind like weathercocks, started acting militant, and called for a national labour demonstration (legal) on Friday, December 14. The union leaders' strike demands covered the same basic economic demands as the Yellow Vests. The event was to be a demonstration of power, a public relations leadership challenge, and it was pointedly planned for Friday, not Saturday—the day the Yellow Vests' demonstrate. The Friday December 14 union demonstrations were hardly imposing compared to Saturday's Yellow Vest events, so the ploy fizzled.

Two months later, the CGT issued another call for a one-day "General Strike" on February 5 (a Tuesday). It seemed like a replay of the same ploy, but in a gesture toward the more and more obvious need for "convergence," Martinez opened a crack for Yellow Vests "to join if they wished" (as he said the day before the Strike). However the next day, blowing with a different wind, he changed his tune and actually made some sensible remarks about convergence:

"People have been saying for more than two months that we must talk and find common demands. We have them. There is no reason we shouldn't march side by side, the ones behind the others. What is important is to have a successful first day of action together, because I find that the bosses have been let off easy (by the Yellow Vests—Ed.) and it is time to bring to account the big bosses of this country."

Martinez remark about needing to attack the big bosses was both pointed and to the point. The Yellow Vests, given their broad and varied social composition, have naturally focused on the consumer issues they have in common as working folk struggling to make ends meet: high prices, unfair taxes and declining social services, directing their anger at the government, the media and the political elite. Their signs often denounce "capitalism", but as a group they have no direct relationship with big industry and finance in whose interest Macron rules. Yet clearly, only with the active participation of France's organised workers can this broad popular movement succeed—for example through an unlimited general strike with occupations of workplaces and public spaces as in 1968.

The Opening of Chapter Two in the Movement?

More encouraging, Martinez' co-organiser of the February 5 strike, Cécile Gondar-Lalanne, whose union Sud-Solidaires has been supportive of the Yellow Vests from the start, declared: "if today works out, we must look forward doing it again, to constructing a common movement." Such a convergence of the Reds with the Yellows, if it develops, might release a revolutionary power greater than anything we have seen in modern history.

The Yellows, composed of a cross-section of the common people in the provinces, already have the support of the vast majority of French people. They have held off the government for thirteen weeks and show no sign of relenting. The Reds, meaning the organised workers, have the power to strike and bring a halt to France's major

industries, transportation, energy and all public services, as they did in 1936 and 1968.

United, the Reds and the Yellows have the potential to change the system, and many of the Yellows clearly have system-change on their agenda.

System-change is definitely not on the agenda of Martinez and the other union bureaucrats, whose social status, like that of the members of the National Assembly, depends on their role as the official "representatives" of their constituents within the existing system. Given the pressure from below, Martinez has no choice but to play at "convergence" with the Yellow Vests today, but it is only to outmaneuver them and secure his official status as labour's representatives. This is precisely what the Yellow Vests feared from the start when they founded their movement on autonomy—perhaps remembering the dismal role played by the CGT in ending the general strike and popular uprising that shook up the De Gaulle regime in 1968 (and whose 50th anniversary was being celebrated all over the media all last year).

So Red–Yellow convergence is taking place in a conflictual context pitting the traditionally hierarchical, vertical discipline of the CGT and other French labour organisations against the innovative, horizontal self-organisation of the proudly autonomous Yellow Vests. The presence, of demonstrators with big red CGT badges on their Yellow Vests, is already significant. The fact that these Red–Yellow (Orange?) activists dare to openly display their independence within the tightly organised culture of the CGT is a sign of cracks opening in that bureaucratic structure through

which imaginative wildcat initiatives may emerge.

Convergence is also developing from below, through mutual understanding. According to the investigative journalism site *Médiapart*, there are several Yellow Vest activists who understand that the problem is big capital. Likewise, there are several CGT activists who distributed CGT flyers on February 5 showing a red arm and a yellow arm holding each others hand. As a Yellow Vest activist concluded: “Today may be the beginning of Chapter Two of our movement. We must all converge!”

Yellow Vests’ Self-Education in Action

Over time, the Yellow Vests’ objectives have indeed deepened, as evidenced by the evolution of the home-made signs at demonstrations, by lists of progressive demands from various local groups, and finally, at the end of January 2019, by a Declaration voted by a “General Assembly of General Assemblies” held in the town of Commercy, attended by Yellow Vests mandated by some 75 different local groups. A second Assembly, bringing together many more groups, is being prepared as the Yellow Vests structure themselves in a loose federation and learn to represent themselves through delegates selected (always one woman and one man) with limited mandates and subject to recall (the system of the Paris Commune of 1871).

The Commercy Declaration defines their goals as “dignity,” an “end to inequality”, “free public services”, “higher” salaries, retirement benefits, etc., taxing the super-rich to pay for them and the restructuring of France as a

participatory democracy through referendums. At the same time, in response to charges by Macron, the media and any number of groups on the far Left, The Yellow Vests Declaration declares: “we are neither racist, nor sexist, nor homophobic, we are proud to come together with our differences to build a society of solidarity.” Although this radical Declaration is not a binding program, it expresses a consensus and has been quickly adopted by many Yellow Vest groups, who are looking forward to a larger nationwide Assembly of Assemblies in two months.

Macron’s Throne Is Shaky

As for Macron, his popularity is hovering at around 22% thanks to his regal pretensions, inflexible neo-liberal orthodoxy, methodical use of violence to suppress the expression of legitimate citizen grievances and criticism, and his contemptuous way of talking down to his angry subjects. This figure is slightly above the 18% of the 2017 Presidential vote he got on the first round, before being elected as the only alternative to “the fascist LePen”. Compare this with approval of the Yellow Vests, which stands at 77%.

Curiously, the French public intellectuals and philosophers, who occupy a much larger space in the media than their American counterparts, have mostly turned a cold shoulder to the Yellow Vests. Only two have seriously take up their defense: the popular libertarian philosopher Michel Onfray (author of 100 books) and the historian–anthropologist–essayist Emmanuel Todd. They alone carry on the contrarian tradition of Voltaire, Zola and Sartre into the 21st Century, our epoch in which the mediated

intellectuals, like the media personalities, the media owners, the politicians and the labour leaders have all become integral parts of what the French call “the political class”.

Meanwhile, Macron is traveling outside of France and playing a role in international affairs to deflect from the intractable crisis at home, while the media keep up a business as usual façade, reducing the Yellow Vest insurrection to a weekly tally of the number of demonstrators (aren’t they declining yet?), the number of arrests and of cars burnt. Like frightened little kids, the French elites think that if they hide their eyes all these angry little people will go away, but they won’t. What will Act XIII (or Chapter Two) reveal?

(Richard Greeman is a left scholar long active in human rights, anti-war, anti-nuclear, environmental and labour struggles in the US, Latin America, France and Russia.)

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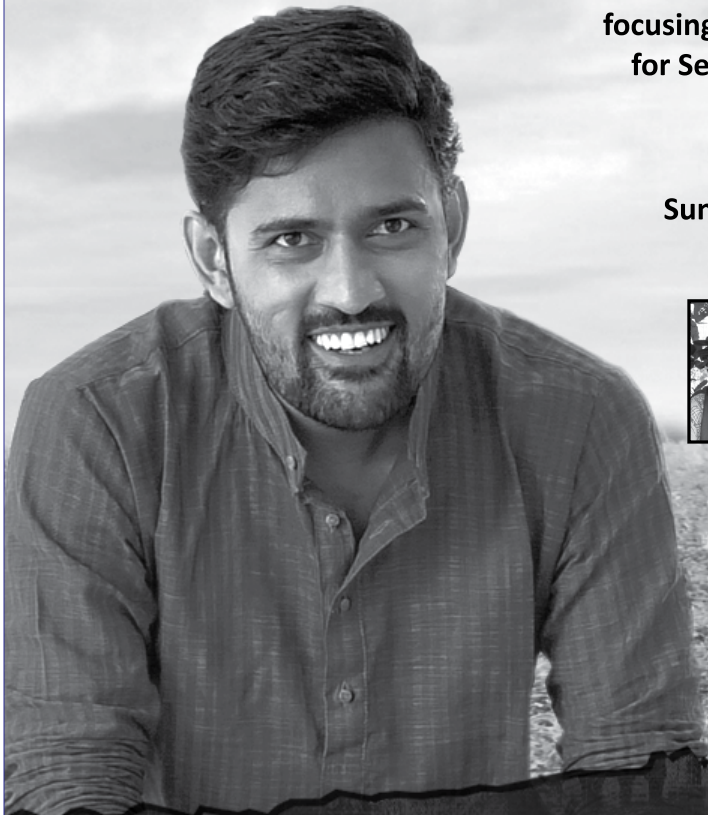
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An Open Letter to the People of the United States

If I know anything, it is people, because like yourselves, I am a man of the people. I was born and raised in a poor neighborhood of Caracas. I was forged in the heat of popular and union struggles in a Venezuela submerged in exclusion and inequality. I am not a tycoon, I am a worker in thought and heart. Today I have the great privilege of presiding over the new Venezuela, rooted in a model of inclusive development and social equality, envisioned by Commander Hugo Chávez since 1998 and inspired by the Bolivarian legacy.

We are today living a historical moment. In these coming days, the future of our countries will be defined as one of war or peace. Your national representatives in Washington want to bring to your borders the same hatred that they sowed in Vietnam. They want to invade and intervene in Venezuela—they say, as they said then—in the name of democracy and freedom. But this is not so. The story of the usurpation of power in Venezuela is as false as the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. It is a false case, but it can have dramatic consequences for our entire region.

Venezuela is a country that, by virtue of its 1999 Constitution, has

broadly expanded the participatory and protagonistic democracy of the people, and in an unprecedented manner, is one of the countries with the largest number of electoral processes held over the last 20 years. You might not like our ideology or our appearance, but we exist and we are millions.

I address these words to the people of the United States of America to warn of the seriousness and danger of some sectors in the White House considering an invasion of Venezuela with unpredictable consequences for my country and for the entire American region. President Donald Trump also intends to disrupt the noble dialogue initiatives promoted by Uruguay and Mexico, with the support of CARICOM, for a peaceful solution and dialogue in favour of Venezuela. We know that, for the good of Venezuela, we must sit down and talk because to refuse dialogue is to choose the path of force. Keep in mind the words of John F. Kennedy: “Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate.” Are those who do not want to dialogue afraid of the truth?

The political intolerance towards the Venezuelan Bolivarian model

and the appetite for our immense oil resources, minerals, and other great riches, has prompted an international coalition headed by the US government to commit the serious insanity of militarily attacking Venezuela, under the false pretext of a non-existent humanitarian crisis.

The people of Venezuela have suffered painful social wounds caused by a criminal commercial and financial blockade, which has been aggravated by the seizing and theft of our financial resources and assets in countries aligned with this demented onslaught.

And yet, thanks to a new system of social protection, of direct attention to the most vulnerable sectors, we proudly continue to be a country with one of the highest human development indices and with lowest inequality in the Americas.

The US people must know that this complex multifaceted aggression is carried out with total impunity and in clear violation of the United Nations Charter, which expressly rejects the threat or use of force, among other principles and purposes for the sake of peace and friendly relations between Nations.

We want to continue being business partners of the people of the United States, as we have been throughout our history. The politicians in Washington, on the other hand, are willing to send their sons and daughters to die in an absurd war, instead of respecting the sacred right of the Venezuelan people to self-determination and to safeguard our sovereignty.

Like you, people of the United States, we Venezuelans are patriots. And we shall defend our homeland with every piece of our soul. Today Venezuela is united in a single voice: we demand the end of aggression that

seeks to suffocate our economy and socially suffocate our people, as well as an end to the serious and dangerous threats of military intervention against Venezuela. We appeal to the good soul of US society, a victim of its own leaders, to join our call

for peace: let us be all one people against warmongering and war.

Long live the peoples of America!

Nicolás Maduro

President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Pulwama: A Wake Up Call for Peace in the Region

Ram Puniyani

The suicidal terrorist, Adil Ahmad Dar, rammed his explosive laden car into two trucks of a CRPF convoy on 14 February 2019. The blast led to the brutal murder of 44 jawans, a big national tragedy, most heinous and condemnable. In terms of scale and casualties, it exceeds even the Uri attack of 18 September 2016, in which four heavily armed terrorists targeted an Army brigade headquarters, killing 19 soldiers. The Pulwama attack is even more serious than car-bombing at the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly complex in Srinagar on 1 October 2001, that killed 38 people. Both the Uri and Legislative Assembly terrorist attacks are said to have been carried out by the Pakistan-based terror outfit Jaish-e-Mohammed (J-e-M). The same organisation has also taken responsibility for the Pulwama attack now.

In the aftermath of the Uri attack, India undertook a surgical strike in Pakistan, with the assumption that it is the fitting response to Uri terror attack. Pakistan denied any such attack having taken place on its soil. One recalls that even when demonetisation was undertaken, the claim was that it will curtail militancy in Kashmir as terrorists

are able to operate with counterfeit currency, and demonetisation will render this currency useless. It is clear that there is no let up in terrorist attacks in Kashmir.

Following the attack, the Modi Government is trying to flex its muscles. Prime Minister Modi has declared that the army has been given a green signal to take suitable steps to counter the situation. Meanwhile, other developments taking place on the ground across the country are disturbing. There are reports that Kashmiri students have been threatened in various cities in several states. Tathagat Roy, the Governor of Meghalaya has given the call to boycott Kashmiris. A deliberate attempt is being made by Hindutva groups like Bajrang Dal, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bharatiya Janata Party supporters to whip up nationalistic passions with chants of 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai', waving of the tricolour, giving slogans against Pakistan, and associating Pakistan with Muslims. The likes of Anupam Kher and Sonu Nigam are spewing anger against secular and liberal people. At several places, vigilante groups are threatening Muslims. The situation in Jammu required the imposition of curfew as the

threat to Muslims was palpable in the area. The BJP's state chief of J&K Ravindra Raina and MP Jugal Kishore took part in the protests targeting the Muslims. The BJP has distanced itself from the violence without giving any statement condemning the participation of its leaders in these vicious protests. The violence has left Kashmiri Muslims living in Jammu and other parts of India fearful.

It is another matter that in different places, many Muslim groups have come on the streets to denounce Pakistan and have strongly condemned the terror attack. The Chief of Ajmer Dargah, Syed Zainul Abedin, went to the extent of saying that people from Pakistan will be barred from visiting the Ajmer shrine. On one hand, activists and groups wanting peace have issued appeals for sheltering the targeted Kashmiris, while many local level leaders have threatened that those sheltering Kashmiris will be attacked. The speeches of communal elements are charging up the atmosphere in a very negative and divisive way.

How do we deal with this situation and bring peace to Kashmir? First we have to identify as to why the region is gripped in such a terror. There are multiple components, which have got mixed up. The militancy in Kashmir began in the decades of 1960s and assumed horrendous proportions since the 1980s. The core issue was the feeling of alienation in Kashmir. The feeling is that their autonomy has been curtailed over a period of time. This autonomy was a part of the treaty through which Kashmir acceded to India. As per article 370, Kashmir Assembly has all powers barring the areas of defense, communications,

currency and external affairs. The abolition of this clause has been the an important part of the Hindutva agenda of RSS-BJP.

After the accession of Kashmir to India, the communal groups started the campaign that Kashmir should be totally merged into India. This sowed the seeds of the process of alienation of Kashmiri people right from the 1950s onwards. As this alienation increased, it led to many elements becoming disgruntled eventually led to the birth of militancy, which was given full support from across the border by Pakistan. Another development which has fuelled the growth of terrorism in the region is related to the politics for the control of oil resources. This process was initiated by America which helped the grooming of Al Qaeda type elements in Pakistani madrassas. This process of grooming terrorist elements was not only encouraged by also totally funded by America in the 1980s (America spent 8000 million dollars and supplied armaments to the tune of 7000 tons). These terrorist groups, after winning the war against the Soviet/Russian occupation of Afghanistan, now became jobless and so entered Kashmir, taking advantage of the dissatisfaction that was already there. They trampled upon the unique culture of Kashmir, known as Kashmiriyat, a cultural synthesising of Buddhist values, Vedanta and Sufi tradition. This was one of the major factors which started the communalisation of the Kashmir problem and led to the exodus of Kashmiri Pundits from the Valley.

The Al Qaeda type terror groups, funded by America and housed in Pakistan, have now assumed the form of Frankenstein's monster.

Pakistan has lost over seventy thousand people in terror attacks, including the ex-Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto. These terror groups do indeed get patronage from a section of the Pakistani army. The response to the situation of turmoil in Kashmir region requires a comprehensive understanding of the genesis and growth of terrorism in Kashmir. Adil Ahmad Dar, the Jaish-e-Mohammad recruit, is a local boy from Kashmir, who took the path of terror after being thrashed by the army. So far, most foot soldiers of the terror outfits have been from across the border. Now agitated local boys also have started joining these organisations. It is to be noted that during the last four and half years of Modi rule, the number of terror acts, recruits for terrorism and the army personnel killed in such incidents has gone up several times. An IndiaSpend analysis (a non-profit data portal) based on government data shows that over 800 terror incidents have been reported in J&K over the three years ending 2017, increasing from 208 in 2015 to 342 in 2017. As many as 744 people have died in these three years: 471 terrorists, 201 security forces and 72 civilians. While one can say that Pakistan based terror groups have played a major role in increasing the terror acts, it is equally true that this increase is the result of policies of the Modi regime, where dialogue has been replaced by bullets and pellet guns. Can terrorism be wiped out by bullets alone?

We of course need to improve the intelligence and security and prevent recurrence of such attacks. Surely the Pakistan based terror groups need to be punished and brought to book. At the same time, it also needs to be realised that a surgical

strike and aggressive words cannot save the region from the present tormenting situation. War is no solution, war itself is the problem. It is the soldiers again who will have to bear the brunt of the damages of war. Along with that, the whole region will sink into an abyss from which recovery will take years. While pursuing a firm policy in Kashmir and with our neighbour, we need to initiate a solid process of dialogue with the disgruntled elements and with our neighbour to bring peace to the region. A lasting peace is what we need; temporary aggressive measures will not eliminate the seeds of terror in the region. We need to introspect and realise that while Pakistani support and housing of terror groups worsens the situation, unless we address the grievances of local people, the outsiders will keep making merry by instigating and supporting the local dissident elements.

The creation of an atmosphere of retaliation is worsening the situation. It is a short sighted response, and inadequate to eliminate the problem of terrorism in the region. The present atmosphere where Muslims are feeling insecure and Kashmiris are being targeted is worsening the situation. We do need to give an atmosphere of security and amity to all our citizens. An appeal of harmony from the top may restrain the communal elements who in their display of hyper nationalism are creating a situation which violates the principle of fraternity, the foundation of our nation and the base of our Constitution.

(Ram Puniyani is a former professor of biomedical engineering and former senior medical officer affiliated with the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay.)

War Mongering Must Give Way to Trust, Peace and Friendship

Sandeep Pandey

I went to participate in a candle light homage paying event at Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's statue organised by about 200 Dalit students on Hazratganj main crossing in Lucknow on 16 February 2019 evening, two days after the dastardly terrorist act in Pulwana, Jammu and Kashmir, in which 37 Central Reserve Polica Forces' personnel were killed. While the condolence meeting by Dalits students was sombre with no slogans being raised, at the neighbouring Mahatma Gandhi statue, much smaller nationalist groups of different shades were crying hoarse over each other shouting anti-Pakistan slogans, a sight that may have made Gandhi cringe.

The crucial question that arises is why do such terrorist attacks continue to take place, if Indian government, as claimed by the Prime Minister, has already given a fitting reply to Pakistan after the Uri terrorist attack in the form a surgical strike? There is a clamour among the Hindutva hardliners for a stronger surgical strike. If the 2016 surgical strike has not deterred Pakistan based terror groups or the Pakistani Army, what is the guarantee that a fresh one will do? And how much stronger surgical strike can be launched before it triggers a war? And who knows when the war will degenerate into a nuclear one? In fact, Government of India's hard-line position against Pakistan and refusal to engage in a dialogue has made the situation worse.

Meanwhile, in Afghanistan, as

the United States prepares to pull out its troops, India has been left out in the cold. Donald Trump, who till now had adopted a reprimanding attitude towards Pakistan for having given shelter to terrorist organisations, has now realised its importance in brokering a peace deal with Taliban. Now he ridicules Narendra Modi as someone who tells him that India has built a library in Afghanistan, undermining the Parliament building made by the previous Indian government in Kabul. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who did not spare any international forum to demand isolation of Pakistan for its role in promoting terror, has failed to convince even one important nation. China has blocked the Indian attempt at United Nations to declare Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar, the man behind the 2001 Parliament attack and also behind the recent Pulwama incident, as a global terrorist. Russis, till sometime back considered close to India, is now building a military partnership with Pakistan.

The Indian government, like in the past terrorist attacks, has blamed Pakistan for the Pulwama terrorist attack. Can the Pakistani government be held responsible for J-e-M's act? India thinks so, but the rest of the world doesn't agree with this point of view. Will the Pakistani government risk supporting such an attack on India when it is just about to host US-Taliban talks in Islamabad and is happy to be back in the good books of the US? It desperately needs US financial help

to sustain its security apparatus.

India must realise that the victim card it plays is not isolating Pakistan but is increasingly making India helpless. In no position to launch a full fledged war because of the impending danger of use of nuclear weapons, it is in India's interest to buy peace with Pakistan and restore normalcy in Kashmir.

Facing marginalisation in Afghanistan peace talks, the Indian government through its Army Chief Bipin Rawat has signaled that it is willing to talk to Taliban. But this same government refuses to engage with the elected government of Pakistan, failed to pull along a coalition in J&K with the People's Democratic Party and does not acknowledge the presence of All Parties Hurriyat Conference, which possibly has more hold on people than any political party there. In fact, it questioned Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi for having had telephonic talks with Hurriyat leaders recently. It doesn't believe in dialogue and doesn't want anybody else to dialogue with anybody else. This holier than thou attitude has played havoc with the people of J&K.

If the Indian government has no qualms about talking to Taliban, then it should reconsider its position on avoiding dialogue with Pakistan and Kashmiri political actors. Imran Khan has preempted India by taking the Kartarpur Corridor initiative, forcing India to cooperate as the Indian government cannot afford to hurt religious sentiments of the Sikh community. It should initiate full fledged dialogue process at the highest level. It cannot hope to have a better combination than Imran Khan—Shah Mehmood Qureshi at the helm of affairs in

Pakistan. It is a pity that there are attempts to cow down Navjot Singh Sidhu for advocating dialogue with Pakistan, who seems to be the only Indian politician who is trying to inject some sanity in the otherwise virulent atmosphere created in the country in the name of nationalist politics.

To restore peace in J&K, Indian government must engage with Hurriyat leaders, pave the way for State elections (possibly along with the general elections due in May), and help in the formation of the next elected government. The Indian government has to trust J&K government to run its affairs on its own, with the help of local police to control the law and order situation like in other states. The army's role should be limited to protecting borders only. Armed Forces Special Powers Act must be given a silent burial, a vocal demand for which was made by Omar Abdullah when he was the Chief Minister. In essence, until the Indian government stops treating Kashmir like its colony, peace is unlikely to return to the valley. No government can use pellet guns on its own people.

We have moved away from Gandhian values, especially in the current regime headed by Narendra Modi who doesn't visualise Gandhi's role beyond the sanitation campaign. And we have to rely on our Constitution to bring back normalcy to Kashmir. Narendra Modi has to expand his publicly declared chest size of 56 inches to allow a larger heart to extend a hand of friendship and peace to the people of Kashmir, its political actors, even those of separatist hues, and Pakistan. It must reach a written or an unwritten arrangement, just

like the one with China, not to let soldiers from either side use any fire power. Both governments will have to jointly deal with terrorists because terror organisations based in Pakistan are hurting Pakistani population probably more than Indian population, something which very few people realise in India.

(Sandeep Pandey is a social activist and Magsaysay Award recipient.)

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Budget 2019: Pension Scheme for Unorganised Workers Is Yet Another Illusion

Sudhir Katiyar

The NDA government in its last budget before the election has announced an ambitious pension scheme for unorganised sector workers.

Given its tendency for hyperbole, the scheme is already being touted as the largest pension scheme in the world with 100 million potential beneficiaries. Let us therefore ponder the fate of similar schemes that were launched in the very first year of the Narendra Modi government, like for instance the Shramev Jayate programme that was launched with much fanfare for this very category of workers.

Under the scheme, all the unorganised sector workers were to be issued social security cards (UWIN, or Unorganised Workers Identification Number cards). “The workers will be assigned a unique identity so as to give them social security benefits including health insurance and old age pension,” the business newspaper Mint reported in February 2015, i.e. four years ago. BJP ministers held fairs and collected thousands of forms that are mostly gathering dust.

The current scheme is likely to meet a similar fate.

The Atal Pension Yojna, with features very similar to the new scheme, was launched on May 9, 2015—targeting this very sector with similar hyperbole. The scheme struggled from the very beginning. The scheme had a target of covering some 2.2 crore people by December 2015. However only about 6.5% of the target was achieved by due date.

Three years after its launch, the scheme had a subscriber base of 1.1 crore people—no doubt a substantial number by itself, but still a minuscule proportion of the vast mass of 41.6 crore workers estimated to form the workforce in the unorganised sector according to the 66th round of NSSO in 2011–12. It is a telling commentary on the polity of our time that in its rush for ‘political surgical strikes’ before the upcoming elections, the government has launched a new scheme with more or less the same features that were the cause of the failure of its previous scheme.

Unrealistic goals

The latest scheme can be critiqued on two major grounds. First is that the contributions are not linked to employment of workers and are voluntary in nature. For a large number of reasons, detailed below, the workers are not likely to welcome the scheme and deposit their contributions. The second is that by the age of 60 year when the pension benefits are supposed to start flowing in, a large chunk of workers will not be alive any more to claim benefits.

Social security schemes all over the world and even in India are linked with employment. The social security deductions are made from the employee’s salary with a corresponding deduction from the employers. However in the new scheme, the contributions are to be made only by the workers. To expect workers to deposit their

contributions regularly over a period of 20 to 30 years is asking for the impossible.

The state record is so erratic and so anti-worker that to expect the workers to deposit any part of their hard earned income in a scheme from which benefits will flow after 20 to 30 years is completely unrealistic. To illustrate, even right now, PF deductions are being made from wages of millions of contract workers without their being even aware of it. Employees Provident Fund Organization is aflush with hard earned money of unorganised sector workers for which there are no claimants.

To give another example, every state has launched contributory pension schemes for unorganised sector workers that are defunct and it is impossible to claim back the contributions made by the workers.

Another major ground of critique is that by the age of 60 years when the pension funds would start flowing, majority of the workers who have paid premium for 20 to 30 years would not be alive to avail benefits. This provision shows how divorced Lutyens Delhi is from the dust and grime of real India.

While an age of 60 years is good for giving post-retirement benefits to middle classes, it is completely unrealistic for hard working informal sector workers. The current average life expectancy in India is 68.8 years and for rural males it is 65 years. However, life expectancy in India varies sharply with socio-economic status. The scheduled caste and

scheduled tribe communities, who supply the maximum number of workers to the informal sector, have distinctly lower life expectancies than that of normal upper-caste middle-class Indians.

A paper written by S.K. Mohanty and F. Ram from International Institute for Population Studies titled *Life Expectancy at Birth Among Social And Economic Groups in India* showed that the life expectancy amongst scheduled tribes in 2006 was 60.3 years. For the poor scheduled tribes, it was as low as 56.9 years. It can be assumed that the unorganised sector workers fall in the poor category. For poor scheduled castes, life expectancy was 63 years.

While there would have been a slight increase in this over the last decade, the life expectancy for males in these two categories will be lower than the average. These figures can be tweaked in a number of ways, but one thing is very clear: a large majority of the informal sectors will not be alive at 60 years to claim benefits.

In fact, the life expectancy for manual workers, who work in hard jobs like construction, brick kilns and quarrying, is likely to be even lower. Even a cursory glance at any workplace would reveal that age of majority of the work force in jobs that require hard manual labour is below 40 years. There are no more jobs for these workers after they cross into middle age. A pension scheme for unorganised sector workers should therefore begin at 55 years or even earlier.

But then, is there no way that unorganised sector workers can be provided social security? Actually good models exist that are working. The Maharashtra Mathadi and Other

Manual Workers Act 1969 provides such a model. More than 30 Mathadi Boards are functional in Maharashtra providing social security to lakhs of head load workers of Maharashtra, though Mathadi workers there are now apprehensive about the future of these boards.

The Act regulates employment, establishes a employer–worker relationship and links the social security benefits to employment.

These three elements—regulation of employment, establishing an employer–worker relationship, and linkage of social security—are the three pivots crucial for any social security scheme for unorganised sector workers. Otherwise there can only be jumlas.

(Sudhir Katiyar is with the Centre for Labor Research and Action.)

A Modest Tax on Billionaires Can Ensure Basic Economic Rights to All

Prabhat Patnaik

The basic income scheme that is in the air these days, which amounts to handing over a certain sum of money to every household to ensure that it reaches a threshold cash income, is an extremely flawed scheme. Instead of enjoining upon the state the obligation to provide essential goods and services like food, education and health to its citizens, it absolves the State of all such responsibility, once it has handed over a certain amount of money, an amount moreover which is not truly indexed to prices and whose transfer is usually accompanied by a withdrawal of existing subsidies and welfare expenditures. Besides, even conceptually, cash transfers amount to a largesse given by the State, while what should be insisted upon is the right of every citizen to a minimum standard of material life which the State has a duty to provide.

Whenever this issue of economic rights of citizens, on a par with the political rights enshrined in the Constitution, is raised, the question is typically asked: where are the

resources for it? Such a question, of course, is never raised when the Budget hands over huge amounts as concessions to capitalists, ostensibly to boost their “animal spirits” so that they can invest more and raise the growth rate. It comes up only when raising the people’s living standards is under discussion. Still, no matter how dishonest the questioners’ intent, it is worth providing a rough answer to this question. This is given below.

Let us take five basic universal and justiciable economic rights: right to food, right to free publicly-provided quality healthcare through a National Health Service, right to free publicly provided quality education, right to employment, and right to adequate old-age pension and disability benefits. And let us see how much these rights would cost. We shall examine only the additional expenditure over and above what is already spent on some of these items at present, as if we are taking a snapshot picture today. These estimates rely on the work of many

independent researchers, who are not specifically named.

It has been estimated that for providing employment for 100 days per household to 37.5 million urban households (living in towns with population less than one million), the total cost, including both wages and material costs (in the ratio 50:50), at wage rates which vary according to skill-level, Rs 300 per day for the bottom 30%, Rs 500 for the next 30% and Rs 700 for the next 20% (the top 20% are assumed not to avail of such work) will be Rs. 2.8 lakh crore per annum. In rural areas, if the rural job guarantee scheme, MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme), is actually made to provide 100 days of employment to every job-card holder at a wage rate of Rs 200 per day, then the total cost would be Rs. 2.3 lakh crore. The two schemes together, urban and rural, add up to Rs 5.1 lakh crore. Since Rs. 60,000 crore is the current allocation for MGNREGS in the Central Budget, the additional amount required is Rs 4.5 lakh crore.

We have taken only 100 days of employment per household, and that too only for job-card holders in rural areas, and in towns below one million population in urban areas. This is not the same as ensuring a right to employment for every individual citizen, which is our aim. But there will be no more than two employment-seeking individuals per household (children will be in school anyway in the new situation), and the number of days of actual employment demanded, which will be in addition to the employment they already have (and this will increase because of the institution of the other rights), will perhaps be

less than 100 on average. In fact in urban areas, it is unlikely that two individuals in 80% of households will be demanding 100 days of employment each. Considering all these factors which act in contrary directions, we can perhaps take this figure of Rs 4.5 lakh crore as a first approximation to the amount that needs to be provided for instituting the right to employment as such.

As regards food, there is already a substantial food subsidy that is provided for in the budgets of the Centre and the states. The universalisation of the distribution of cheap food, considering that there will be a certain amount of voluntary drop-out, is unlikely to require more than an additional Rs 1 lakh crore.

As regards pensions, it has been estimated that 12.8 crore persons above the age of 60 will need to be catered to. Providing pensions, entirely on a non-contributory basis, at the rate of Rs 2,000 per month to about 12.8 crore persons above the age of 60, would cost, in round figures, an additional Rs 3 lakh crore.

On education and health, instead of making specific estimates, let us assume that 6% of gross domestic product (GDP) should be provided for the former, as suggested long ago by the Kothari Commission, from the coffers of the State, and 3% of GDP should be provided for the latter, which is a benchmark suggested by many, from the coffers of the State. This would require the State to increase its education expenditure by 2% of GDP and its health expenditure by 2% of GDP also. These two together add up to Rs 6.6 lakh crore.

The total of all these amounts comes to Rs 15.1 lakh crore, or roughly 9% of GDP. True, there are many expenditures we have left

out; but, on the other side, while our concern is with additional expenditure, we have not reckoned with current state government expenditures, which are quite substantial under many of these heads. Besides, the expenditure on some of these heads ipso facto leads to the achievement of other objectives: instituting an authentic right to education, for instance, requires large-scale construction of school buildings, which also generates employment and hence serves ipso facto to realise the right to employment. Adding up, as we have done, the requirements calculated for different heads, therefore, amounts to an overstatement. Assuming on balance that these various over-estimations and under-estimations cancel one another, we shall take Rs 15 lakh crore as the additional sum required at present for realising these five basic economic rights.

How is this sum to be raised? Let us assume that it should not be raised through any increase in the fiscal deficit, not because an increase in this deficit will have inflationary consequences, as is often claimed, but because it increases wealth inequality compared with a situation where an equivalent amount of public expenditure is tax-financed.

There is plenty of scope for raising this sum through wealth taxation. In India, shockingly, there is virtually no wealth taxation worth the name; and wealth inequality has been increasing phenomenally. According to *Credit Suisse* data, the top 1% of households in the country currently own as much as 60% of total private wealth, which is higher than the figure for the US. A host of even "establishment" economists across the world have been demanding higher wealth taxation

to reverse the growing inequality under neo-liberalism which they rightly see as being inimical to democracy. Even the Davos summit has expressed concern over growing wealth inequality. Wealth taxation in short is desirable per se, quite apart from its necessity for meeting welfare expenditures.

To be sure, any wealth taxation has to be a comprehensive one, complemented by taxes on gifts and transfers which would be a means of evasion. But assuming that such checks are in place, wealth taxation, precisely because it hardly exists at present, can be a potent means of resource mobilisation.

According to the *Global Wealth Migration Review 2018*, the total net worth of only billionaires in India

amounts at present to Rs 557 lakh crore. A 1% tax on the wealth of just these billionaires will get, in round figures, Rs 5.6 lakh crore per annum.

Wealth taxation has also got to be supplemented by inheritance taxation. In fact, inheritance taxation is perfectly in sync with the ideology of capitalism. This ideology holds that capitalists owe their wealth to some special talent which they possess. But then there is no reason why their children, until they too have displayed these talents, should also be the possessors of such wealth.

If we assume that every year 5% of the total wealth of billionaires gets transferred to their children, or other legatees, as inheritance, then even a modest taxation of one-third

on such inheritance would fetch Rs 9.33 lakh crore. Just these two taxes in short, and that too levied only on billionaires, will be quite enough to finance the creation of a welfare state in India in which every citizen will enjoy a set of economic rights.

Of course, we have been talking here only of money sums, while one has to consider the logical problems that may arise if taxation of a stock (wealth) is used for generating resources for an expenditure flow. But since the argument invariably is confined to the question of money sums, we have also confined ourselves to this question alone. The basic point is that the money sum required for expenditures to ensure a set of basic economic rights, can be easily raised.

George Fernandes: A Man of Many Contradictions

Qurban Ali

George Mathew Fernandes was one of the firebrand Socialist leaders of his time. He was a priest for a short period, a trade unionist, agriculturist, political activist, human rights activist, parliamentarian and journalist, all rolled into one. He led the famous railway strike involving 1.5 million workers in 1974, when the entire nation was brought to a halt. As the Chairman of the Socialist Party of India, Minister of Communications, Minister of Industry, Minister of Railways and Minister for Defense, George Fernandes was full of surprises and contradictions. I clearly remember that when he was a union minister in the Morarji government, he defended the no-confidence motion against his government for two and a half hours, and then resigned the

same day. That was George!

A politician who long campaigned against the atom bomb, he was also one of the champions of India's nuclear power. Fernandes set new standards as a Defense Minister by braving the inhospitable Himalayan heights to visit troops on the battlefield and became the darling of the jawans.

In 1949, Fernandes moved to Bombay in search of a job. His life was tough in the metropolis and he had to sleep on the streets until he got a job as a proof-reader for a newspaper. George once described the beginning of his career in Bombay in the following words, "When I came to Bombay, I used to sleep on the benches of the Chowpatty Sands. In the middle of the night, policemen would come

and wake me up and ask me to move." Here he came in contact with the great Socialist leader, Dr Rammanohar Lohia, who was also one of the greatest influences on his life. Later, he joined the socialist trade union movement under the veteran trade union leader Placid D' Mello and became his disciple. He rose to prominence as a trade unionist and fought for the rights of labourers in small-scale industries such as hotels and restaurants. Emerging as a key figure in the Bombay labour movement in the early 1950s, Fernandes was a central figure in the unionisation of sections of Bombay labour. As a fiery trade union leader, Fernandes organised many strikes and bandhs in Bombay in the 50s and 60s and soon came to be known as Bumbai Bandh Ka

Hero. He served as a member of the Bombay Municipal Corporation from 1961 to 1967 and continuously raised the problems of the exploited workers in the representative body of the city.

The pivotal moment that thrust Fernandes into the limelight was his decision to contest the 1967 general elections. He was offered a party ticket for the Bombay South constituency by the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP) against the politically more popular Sadashiv Kanoji Patil of the Indian National Congress in Bombay. Sadashiv Kanoji Patil, or S. K. Patil, as he was popularly known, was a seasoned politician, with many decades of experience behind him. S.K. Patil was also a powerful minister in the Indira Gandhi cabinet and an unrivaled fund-raiser for the undivided Congress party. Nevertheless, Fernandes won against Patil by garnering 48.5 per cent of the votes, thus earning his nickname, "George, the Giant Killer".

In the early 1970s, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was riding the crest of unprecedented popularity after the liberation of Bangladesh. But soon after, with notorious corruption cases against her, primarily because of the public awareness created by movements like Navnirman agitation in Gujarat and Bihar, her popularity started waning. George, as President of the All India Railwaymen's Federation, organised one of the most notable agitations the country has seen, the railway strike of 1974. This was also the time when Indira Gandhi ordered the well-known Pokharan nuclear explosion in the deserts of Rajasthan. There are political analysts who believe till today that the much controversial step was

taken by her out of sheer despair, and with the sole intention of breaking the railway strike. The idea was to divert the nation's attention and drum up support for herself. (It is a historical irony that while Pokharan I was prompted by George's strike, Pokharan II was executed with him as the defence minister in the Vajpayee government).

But George Fernandes also has a stained and murky past. He will be remembered as the one who justified the Gujarat riots in 2002 and the murder of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his sons in Odisha. Once upon a time, he was a proponent of Mahatma Gandhi's politics of non-violence, but later turned to believe in politics of violence and organised the 'Baroda Dynamite conspiracy'—a plan to blow up government establishments to protest against the Emergency. When the Emergency was lifted in 1977, Madhu Limaye was offered ministership in Morarji Desai's cabinet but he insisted on making

George a minister to end his trial in the 'Baroda Dynamite Case' so that George could come out of jail. Fernandes will also be remembered for making this country a 'Friend of Israel' by using spies like Ram Swarup as an agent of Israel and against Palestine.

His was a life riddled with controversies and accomplishments alike. A towering figure in modern Indian politics, George was compelled to leave the public eye at the fag end of his political career when his name figured prominently in a corruption case. The scandal caused an uproar and Fernandes had to resign from his post as the Defence Minister in the Vajpayee government. Any chances of returning to political life were quashed with the onset of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. George passed away at 88 and lived with his once-estranged wife Leila Kabir. Rest in Peace, George.

(Qurban Ali is a senior broadcast journalist.)

Namvar Singh Defined the Contours of Hindu Literary Culture

Apoorvanand

The most brilliant mind of our literary world is no more. The death of Hindi literary critic Namvar Singh truly marks the end of an era. What was this era? It was defined by the excitement of creation and an eagerness to sincerely engage with it. It can, therefore, be called a true age of criticism. Namvar Singh was shaped by the Gandhi–Nehru era, which has been the only period of criticism in modern India. For, criticism exists only with

creation. But the task of criticism is not to validate creation or be its propagandist. Criticism is not secondary to creation. Since creation is, in itself, a response, a critical one to the existing reality, it must submit itself to criticism, which examines it by the standards it has set autonomously.

Namvar Singh epitomised this spirit of criticism. Hindi has seen great critics like Ram Chandra Shukla and Hazari Prasad Dwivedi

or Ram Vilas Sharma, but Namvar Singh strode like a colossus. It is seldom that a critic remains at the centre of literary discussion for more than half a century. Namvar Singh, trained in the classical literary traditions, was equally conversant with modern literary canons. He called himself a humble disciple of Dwivedi, who in turn was influenced by the cosmic and cosmopolitan vision of Rabindranath Tagore.

Nothing is beyond criticism, was the motto of the guru and the shishya. No tradition, no canon was sacred or holy enough to not be tested by the fire of criticism. Namvar Singh had tradition in his bones and could, therefore, question its lofty claims—he knew when tradition was a source of nourishment and when it turned into a deadening disease. He was the last authoritative voice on the Aapabhransha literature in Hindi and knew his Sanskrit so well that the Sanskrit scholars never tried to dispute his judgement. Namvar Singh held that tradition can never be seen as singular, it had to be plural. His book, which is also a tribute to his guru, is titled Doosri Parampara Ki Khoj. There was no one single high tradition to which all “little” traditions must submit. He loved new voices. Young writers remember with gratitude and fondness the phone calls and postcards from Namvar Singh. He preferred to err on the side of New. Only Ashok Vajpeyi comes close to him in this respect.

The range of Namvar Singh’s scholarship was mind-boggling. He was inarguably the first and the only Hindi scholar and intellectual who commanded the respectful attention of luminaries from the world of social sciences and politics. He remained a voracious reader till

the last and, like Bipan Chandra, fought his weakening eyesight to keep reading. It can be said that reading ate into his writing time. He remained a reluctant writer. People often treated this as laziness, but those who knew him well understood that it was his humility, the result of his companionship with the greats of the world of letters, that made him a reluctant writer.

Namvar Singh is described as a Marxist critic. But the adjective is redundant when applied to his work. Criticism is not a colony of social sciences. In fact, its autonomy from ideological labels makes it a worthwhile activity. He also did not fall into the trap of theory, which became a fashion in the West and marginalised the discipline of criticism for a long time. For Namvar Singh, practical criticism was essential to keep the act of criticism relevant, not only to literature but to life itself. He was the first Marxist to challenge the official Marxian aesthetic canons and introduce revisionists or unofficial Marxists such as Walter Benjamin, Theodore Adorno and Antonio Gramsci to the Hindi reading public.

Namvar Singh developed a unique writing style. He wore his scholarship lightly and his writing was accessible even to those uninitiated into literary discourses. He was also popular as a orator, who commanded large followings in big and small towns. People from all walks of life thronged to listen to him. Not surprisingly, some called this frugal writer a representative of vachik tradition.

Namvar Singh never sacrificed his teaching for the sake of his other vocation, writing. He was faithful to his students, and prepared meticulously for his classes. He

enjoyed polemics. There has not been a better master of this art than him. But he yearned for dialogue and understanding. Criticism can remain democratic only by inviting conversation.

In the passing away of Namvar Singh, the art of the word has lost a true lover.

(The writer teaches at Delhi University.)

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Setting the Record Straight on Gandhi and Race

Ramachandra Guha

Was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi a racist? This question is being asked afresh in light of the removal of a Gandhi statue in Ghana. The petition that led to the statue being taken down quoted several statements made by Gandhi. Notably, however, they all date from his early years in South Africa. What Gandhi said or thought about Africa and Africans, race and racism, in his mature adulthood are ignored altogether.

In his 20s, Gandhi was unquestionably a racist. He believed in a hierarchy of civilisations, with Europeans at the top, Indians just below them and Africans absolutely at the bottom. He spoke of the native inhabitants of Africa in patronising and even pejorative language. However, by the time he was in his mid-30s, Gandhi no longer spoke of Africans as inferior to Indians.

The evolution of Gandhi's views find expression in a fascinating (and neglected) speech delivered by Gandhi at the Johannesburg YMCA in May 1908. He was participating in a debate on the topic: 'Are Asiatics and the Coloured races a menace to the Empire?'

Gandhi may have been the only non-white present; he was certainly the only non-white speaker. Opposing the motion, he pointed out that the labour of Africans and Asians had made the Empire what it was. "Who can think of the British Empire without India?" he asked, adding: "South Africa would probably be a howling wilderness without the Africans." He went on to insist that it was "the mission of

the English race, even when there are subject races, to raise them to equality with themselves, to give them absolutely free institutions and make them absolutely free men."

So by 1908, Gandhi was clear that Africans as well as Indians needed to be placed on an absolutely equal footing with Europeans. In another speech made in Germiston the next year, he said that if the Africans took to non-violent resistance against racial discrimination, "there would probably be no native question left to be solved."

The longer Gandhi lived in Africa, the more he shed the racism of his boyhood and youth. In 1910 he remarked: "The negroes alone are the original inhabitants of the land. . . . The whites, on the other hand, have occupied the land forcibly and appropriated it to themselves."

By now, Gandhi's newspaper, *Indian Opinion*, was featuring reports on discrimination against Africans by the white regime. One such report dealt with an annual high school examination in Pretoria. In the past, African students were allowed to sit with their white peers. This time, the Town Hall—where the exams were held—barred them, passing a resolution that no African or any other person of colour would be allowed to enter the building.

Gandhi thought this reason enough for non-violent protest. "In a country like this," he remarked, "the Coloured people are placed in an extremely difficult situation. We think there is no way out of this except *satyagraha*. Such instances are a natural consequence of the

whites' refusal to treat the Coloured people as their equals. It is in order to put an end to this state of affairs that we have been fighting in the Transvaal, and it is not surprising that the fight against a people with deep prejudice should take a long time."

Gandhi returned to India in 1914. His views on race continued to evolve in a progressive direction. In his book *Satyagraha in South Africa*, published in the 1920s, Gandhi offered a spirited defence of African religion. In disputing the claims of European missionaries, Gandhi wrote that Africans had "a perfect grasp of the distinction between truth and falsehood". He thought they practiced truthfulness to a far greater extent than either Europeans or Indians.

Gandhi's *satyagrahas* of the 1920s and 1930s were widely reported in the African-American press. Reading these reports, a resident of Chicago named Arthur Sewell wrote to Gandhi that the blacks were "keenly and sympathetically" following his movement. Sewell said his people deeply "sympathize[d] and suffer[ed]" with India and Indians, "for here, in America, they [the white racists] not only rob us of our possessions and hurdle us into the prisons unjustly, but they mob, lynch and burn us up with fire."

The struggle against British colonialism in India, thought Sewell, anticipated "the independence of all the dark peoples of the world". "May God bless you," this African-American told Gandhi, "and enable you to carry on the great battle for

righteous adjustment until you win a glorious victory for the common cause of the lowly; that is the prayer of fourteen millions of Negroes of America.”

Gandhi was in touch with leaders of the African National Congress, and with civil right activists from the United States. In 1936, Howard Thurman—a future mentor to Martin Luther King—came to Sevagram to meet Gandhi. Thurman wrote of how he had been subject to an intense examination by the Indian leader: “persistent, pragmatic, questions about American Negroes, about the course of slavery, and how we had survived it.”

Gandhi was puzzled that, in order to escape or defy oppression, the slaves had not converted to Islam, since, as he put it, “the Moslem religion is the only religion in the world in which no lines are drawn from within the religious fellowship. Once you are in, you are all the way in”.

Thurman was impressed both by Gandhi’s curiosity and his range of interests. Gandhi, he recalled, “wanted to know about voting rights, lynching, discrimination, public school education, the churches and how they functioned. His questions covered the entire sweep of our experience in American society.”

Three years later, a leader of the African National Congress named S.S. Tema visited Sevagram. The first question he asked Gandhi was what the ANC could learn from the Indian National Congress. Gandhi thought that the leaders of the ANC were excessively Europeanised, wearing Western dress and professing the Christian faith, in both respects standing apart from the majority of Africans. “You must become

Africans once more,” he told the visitor.

Gandhi told Tema that he wanted the establishment of “the friendliest relations” between Africans and Indians. He thought that Indians should cultivate trust among Africans “by always acting on the square towards you. They may not put themselves in opposition to your legitimate aspirations, or run you down as ‘savages’ while exalting themselves as ‘cultured’ people in order to secure concessions for themselves at your expense.”

Finally, the visitor asked if Christianity could bring ‘salvation to Africa’. Gandhi’s answer is worth quoting in full:

“Christianity, as it is known and practised today, cannot bring salvation to your people. It is my conviction that those who today call themselves Christian do not know the true message of Jesus. I witnessed some of the horrors that were perpetrated on the Zulus during the Zulu rebellion. Because one man, Bambatta, their chief, had refused to pay his tax, the whole race was made to suffer. I was in charge of an ambulance corps. I shall never forget the lacerated backs of Zulus who had received stripes and were brought to us for nursing because no white nurse was prepared to look after them. And yet those who perpetrated all those cruelties called themselves Christians. They were ‘educated’, better dressed than the Zulus, but not their moral superiors.”

These remarks were a decisive advance on, and in some respects a clear repudiation of, Gandhi’s older views on Africans. He no longer believed in a hierarchy of civilisations where Christians and Hindus were at the top and

Africans at the bottom. He had long since rejected his once benign view of imperialism. Europeans were not morally superior to Zulus. In their pursuit of wealth and power, professedly ‘Christian’ nations could be entirely barbaric.

In 1946, a delegation of South African Indians called on Gandhi. He told them to reject a segregated approach to politics. They should, he said, “associate with Zulus and Bantus” too. The “slogan today”, remarked Gandhi, “is no longer ‘Asia for the Asiatics’ or ‘Africa for the Africans’ but the unity of all the exploited races of the earth.”

In the last week of May 1946, Gandhi wrote that “the Indians in South Africa are bearing a heavy burden which they are well able to discharge. Satyagraha, the mightiest weapon in the world, was born and bred there. If they make effective use of it, it will be well with the sacred cause they are handling. . . . The cause is the cause of the honour of India and through her of all the exploited coloured races of the earth, whether they are brown, yellow or black. It is worth all the suffering of which they are capable.”

Reading reports of the arrests of protesters in South Africa, Gandhi wrote an article for his newspaper entitled ‘White Man’s Burden’. The attacks on satyagrahis reminded him of the practice of lynching in the American South. The “real ‘white man’s burden’”, he said, “is not insolently to dominate coloured or black people under the guise of protection, it is to desist from the hypocrisy which is eating into them. It is time white men learnt to treat every human being as their equal.”

These words of Gandhi bear repeating: It is time white men learnt to treat every human being as

their equal. Strikingly, however, the last quote in the recent petition in Ghana dates to 1906. The last four decades of Gandhi's life are left out altogether. Was this out of ignorance or malevolence? One does not know. But the historical record is very clear on this subject.

While as a young man Gandhi may have been a racist,

over time he overcame his racism comprehensively. He befriended, and met on equal terms, men and women of all castes, classes, races, religions and nationalities. He repeatedly argued that the political technique of non-violent resistance, or satyagraha, was necessary to overcome exploitation of all kinds suffered by all races. It was

therefore with good reason that the greatest modern leaders of African descent, such as Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela, saw Gandhi as a model and exemplar in their own struggles against racial discrimination.

(Ramachandra Guha is an Indian historian and writer.)

New Wings for Socialism

Michael A. Lebowitz

Seventeen years ago, in 1990, I began an essay with a poem of Bertolt Brecht. It was a poem about a man in Europe in the Middle Ages who put on "things that looked like wings," climbed to the roof of a church, and tried to fly. He crashed, and the bishop who passed by said, "No one will ever fly."

In 1990, what was called the socialist world had crashed. And, everywhere there were experts who saw this as proof: socialism had failed. No one would ever fly.

What I attempted to do in that essay was to challenge the theoretical arguments against socialism, theoretical arguments, in particular, against the Marxist case for socialism. And, I proposed that there had been a distortion of Marxism both in theory and in practice—a distortion that forgot about human beings, a determinist message focusing upon productive forces that was silent about "the nature of human beings produced within an economic system." The determinist argument which stresses the primacy of productive forces, I argued, could never understand why Marx sacrificed his "health, happiness and family" to write *Capital*. Nor could it make sense of

why Marx never stopped stressing that workers could make themselves fit to create a new society only through the process of struggle.

What was my essential point? It was to emphasize the importance of developing a new common sense—one which sees the logic of producing together in order to satisfy human needs. The failure to do this and to stress instead the development of productive forces, I proposed, leads inevitably to a dead end—the dead end which we could see in front of us. The point was simple: as Che Guevara had stressed in his classic *Man and Socialism in Cuba*, to build socialism it is essential, along with building new material foundations, to build new human beings.

But, how? I focused upon a number of elements. Self-management in the process of production, I argued, was an essential element: "Insofar as people produce themselves in the course of all their activities, the very process of engaging in democratic forms of production is an essential part of producing people for whom the need for cooperation is second nature." But, self-management in particular productive units is not sufficient. You need, I argued, to

replace a focus upon selfishness and self-orientation with a focus upon community and solidarity, a conscious emphasis upon human needs; i.e., the necessity to engage in collective solutions to satisfy human needs must be "recognised as a responsibility of all individuals." And, producing people with these characteristics could never be achieved by a state standing over and above civil society. "Rather, only through their own activities through autonomous organisations—at the neighbourhood, community and national levels—can people transform both circumstances and themselves." What, in short, was necessary was "the conscious development of a socialist civil society."

Thus, rather than a focus upon the development of productive forces, I stressed the centrality of human beings and the development of the institutions which permit them to transform themselves. This had not occurred in the Soviet model. "With its lack of democratic and cooperative production, its absence of a socialist civil society and its actually existing bureaucratic rule," so-called real socialism had not produced the new human beings

who could build a better world. And, that, I proposed, was the lesson we had to learn from this experience. Rather than concluding from the crash that socialism had failed and that no one would ever fly, the lesson for socialists was different. My concluding line was: “No one should ever again try to fly with those things that only look like wings.”

A Confession, a Miracle, and a New Beginning

But, let me make a confession. That argument sounds a lot more confident than I really was. Nineteen-ninety was a time of demoralization. However critical one might be about the inadequacy of the socialist experiments that had now crashed, no one who believed in a society of social justice could escape a sick feeling in the stomach from seeing the apparent victory of capitalism. Cuba had not yet succumbed. But, how long could it hold out by itself? How long before we would hear the triumphant crowing of US imperialism, finally able to destroy this challenge? (A challenge both to its rule of the hemisphere and to its ideological rule.) And, how long, how many generations, before we could try to fly again? All of these worries were not mentioned in the essay. After all, one purpose of the article was to keep the red flag flying rather than to join in a retreat. But, the prospects were not at all encouraging.

Yet, this was all before what I think of as the “Cuban Miracle.” Here was a small, poor country which had been blockaded for decades by US imperialism and that had survived by establishing trade relations and economic integration with the Eastern “real socialist” bloc. And, suddenly that bloc, which accounted for 80 percent of Cuba’s

trade was gone. How could Cuba possibly survive now? How could it purchase the oil it needed to run industry and transportation? And, there weren’t only the economic problems as the result of the disappearance of the Soviet Union and its allies. There was also the accelerated political offensive initiated in the United States with new restrictive legislation such as the Helms-Burton Act designed to bring Cuba to its knees.

But, Cuba was not brought to its knees. The Cuban people suffered. The per capita income dropped a minimum of 33 percent, and in 1994 (when I went there for an international solidarity meeting) you could see the effects in the stores, the streets, and the general health of people. But, what imperialism wanted did not happen: Cuba stayed firm—despite the suffering. And, that is what I call the Cuban Miracle. How did it happen?

Of course, it wasn’t really a miracle—if we mean by that something which drops from the sky and which cannot be explained as a product of human activity. What happened in Cuba can be understood. It reflected years in the development of a new common sense, one in which solidarity was stressed and nurtured (especially through the practice of international solidarity); it mirrored the development of dignity and a pride in the achievements of the Cuban Revolution (especially in the areas of health and education); and it embodied the existence of a strong leadership committed to socialism. Cuba survived this period by building upon its best accomplishments and at the same time deepening its democratic practices through worker and community assemblies and congresses.

In a world where the mantra was

TINA—that there is no alternative to neoliberalism—this was indeed a miracle. It was a miracle in the literal sense: a wonderful thing to behold. And, I think that we do not give this Cuban miracle sufficient credit. Because it demonstrated that there was an alternative, an alternative based on concepts of solidarity and human development. And, that example, an example which demonstrates the importance of the battle of ideas in building new human beings, has been essential especially in Latin America. In this respect, I regard Cuba’s victory over imperialism in the Special Period not as the last chapter of twentieth-century socialism but as a new beginning—the first chapter of socialism for the twenty-first century.

The Vision of Socialism for the Twenty-First Century

What do we mean by socialism for the twenty-first century? I think it is precisely what President Chávez called for when he spoke of the need to reinvent socialism: “We must reclaim socialism as a thesis, a project and a path, but a new type of socialism, a humanist one, which puts humans and not machines or the state ahead of everything.”

That vision can be seen in the Bolivarian Constitution which talks about “ensuring overall human development,” about “developing the creative potential of every human being and the full exercise of his or her personality in a democratic society,” about participation being “the necessary way of achieving the involvement to ensure their complete development, both individual and collective,” and in the identification of democratic planning and participatory budgeting at all levels of society and “self-management,

co-management, cooperatives in all forms” as examples of “forms of association guided by the values of mutual cooperation and solidarity.”

That vision was further articulated by President Chávez, when he talked in 2003 about the nature of the “social economy” which “bases its logic on the human being, on work, that is to say, on the worker and the worker’s family, that is to say, in the human being.” This is the concept of an economy which is not dominated by the idea of economic gain and exchange values; rather, he stressed, “the social economy generates mainly use-value.” Its purpose is “the construction of the new man, of the new woman, of the new society.” This is a familiar vision: it is the ideal of the great religions, of humanist traditions, of indigenous societies—the idea of a human family, of human beings linked by solidarity rather than self-interest.

Certainly, too, this is a vision which rejects the perverse logic of capital and the idea that the criterion for what is good is what is profitable. It rejects the linking of people, too, through exchange of commodities, where our criterion for satisfying the needs of others is whether this benefits us as individuals or groups of individuals. This is a vision expressed so clearly by István Mészáros when he drew upon Marx to talk about a society in which, rather than the exchange of commodities, there is an exchange of activities based upon communal needs and communal purposes. And, that vision was embraced by President Chávez in 2005 when he said “we have to create a communal system of production and consumption, a new system.” We have to build, he insisted, “this communal system

of production and consumption, to help to create it, from the popular bases, with the participation of the communities, through the community organizations, the cooperatives, self-management and different ways to create this system.”

Elements of the New Socialism

But, how do you go beyond a vision to create this new system? What steps do you take? Mészáros emphasizes that in the complex dialectic of production–distribution–consumption, no one part can stand alone—it is necessary to radically restructure the whole of these relations. If we think of socialism, like capitalism, as a “structure of society, in which all relations coexist simultaneously and support one another” (Marx), how can you build this new system? How can you make any real change if you have to change all relations—and you can’t change them all simultaneously?

It must be done the same way that capitalism developed. Capitalism developed through a process, a process of “subordinating all elements of society to itself” and by creating for itself the organs which it lacked. The new socialist society similarly must develop through a process of subordinating all the elements of capitalism and the logic of capital and by a process of inserting its own logic centered in human beings in its place. It proceeds by assembling the elements of a new dialectic of production–distribution–consumption.

What are those elements? At the core of this new combination are three characteristics: (a) social ownership of the means of production, which is a basis for (b) social production organized by workers in order to (c) satisfy communal needs and communal

purposes. Let us consider each in its turn and their combination.

A. Social ownership of the means of production is critical because it is the only way to ensure that our communal, social productivity is directed to the free development of all rather than used to satisfy the private goals of capitalists, groups of individuals, or state bureaucrats. Social ownership, however, is not the same as state ownership. State property is consistent with state capitalist enterprises, hierarchical statist firms, or firms in which particular groups of workers (rather than society as a whole) capture the major benefits of this state property. Social ownership implies a profound democracy—one in which people function as subjects, both as producers and as members of society.

B. Production organized by workers builds new relations among producers—relations of cooperation and solidarity; it furthermore allows workers to end “the crippling of body and mind” and the loss of “every atom of freedom, both in bodily and in intellectual activity” (Marx) that comes from the separation of head and hand characteristic of capitalist production. As long as workers are prevented from developing their capacities by combining thinking and doing in the workplace, they remain alienated and fragmented human beings whose enjoyment consists in possessing and consuming things. Further, as long as this production is carried out for their private gain rather than that of society, they look upon others (and, indeed, each other) as means to their own ends and thus remain alienated, fragmented, and crippled. Social production, thus, is a condition for the full development of the producers.

C. Satisfaction of communal

needs and purposes has as its necessary condition a means of identifying and communicating those needs and purposes. Thus, it requires the development of the democratic institutions at every level which can express the needs of society. Production reflects communal needs only with information and decisions which flow from the bottom up. However, in the absence of the transformation of society, the needs transmitted upward are the needs of people formed within capitalism—people who are “in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birth marks of the old society” (Marx). Within the new socialist society, the “primacy of needs” is based not upon the individual right to consume things without limit but, rather, upon “the worker’s own need for development”; these are the needs of people in a society where the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all. In a society like this, where our productive activity for others is rewarding in itself and where there is all-round development of individuals, society can place upon its banner: to each according to his/her need for development.

As consideration of these three specific elements suggests, realization of each element depends upon the existence of the other two—precisely Mészáros’s point about the inseparability of this distribution-production-consumption complex: Without production for social needs, no real social property; without social property, no worker decision-making oriented toward society’s needs; without worker decision-making, no transformation of people and their needs. The presence of the defects inherited from the old society in any one element poisons

the others. Thus, we return to the essential question: how is a transition possible when everything depends upon everything else?

Building Revolutionary Subjects

In order to identify the measures necessary to build this new socialist society, it is absolutely critical to understand Marx’s concept of “revolutionary practice”—the simultaneous changing of circumstances and human activity or self-change. To change a structure in which all relations coexist simultaneously and support one another, you have to do more than try to change a few elements in that structure, you must stress at all times the hub of all these relations—human beings as subjects and products of their own activity.

Every activity in which people engage forms them. Thus, there are two products of every activity—the changing of circumstance or things (e.g., in the production process) and the human product. This second side of production is easily forgotten when talking about structural changes; however, it was not forgotten in the emphasis of the Bolivarian Constitution upon practice and protagonism—in particular, the stress upon participation as “the necessary way of achieving the involvement to ensure their complete development, both individual and collective.”

What is the significance of recognizing this process of producing people explicitly? First, it helps us to understand why changes must occur in all spheres—every moment that people act within old relations is a process of reproducing old ideas and attitudes. Working under hierarchical relations, functioning without the ability to make decisions in the

workplace and society, and focusing upon self-interest rather than upon solidarity within society—these activities produce people on a daily basis; it is the reproduction of the conservatism of everyday life.

Recognizing this second side also directs us to focus upon the introduction of concrete measures which explicitly take into account the effect of those measures upon human development. Thus, for every step two questions must be asked: (1) how does this change circumstances and (2) how does this help to produce revolutionary subjects and increase their capacities?

We are back, then, at the question of what was missing in the old efforts to build a new socialist society. In forgetting what Che knew—the necessity to build new socialist human beings simultaneously, those early attempts tried to fly with things that only looked like wings. When you begin, however, from the centrality of human subjects, you never forget that democratic, participatory, and protagonistic practices are at the heart of creating the new socialist human beings and a new socialist society.

Let me return explicitly to the title of my essay. We have learned from the failures of the past. And, we no longer accept the story that man will never fly. Venezuela has a wonderful opportunity to build this new society. It is blessed with important natural resources; it has begun upon a path of developing a new common sense based upon protagonism and solidarity, and it has strong socialist leadership. Build it now.

(Michael Lebowitz is professor emeritus of economics at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada.)

Remembering Kaifi Azmi

This is the centenary year of the indefatigable poet-activist, Kaifi Azmi (1919-2002). 'I was born in a slave India, grew up in an Independent India and would like to die in a Socialist India' was his dream. Unfortunately, when he died, the socialist / left movement in the country was on a downswing, while fascist forces were on the rise. Yet, even in his last days, Kaifi Azmi lost none of his hope and conviction. He will always be present in his poetry as a bulwark against despair and defeat, a beacon of courage and hope. We pay our tributes to him by re-publishing his epic poem, Doosa Banwas, that he wrote against the backdrop of the communal violence that followed the Babri Masjid demolition in 1992:

*Ram banwaas se jab laut ke ghar mein aaye,
Yaad jangal bahut aaya jo nagar mein aaye,
Raqsse deewangee aangan mein jo dekha hoga,
6 december ko Shri Ram ne socha hoga,
Itne deewane kahan se mere ghar mein aaye?*

*Jagmagate thhe jahan Ram key qadmon ke nishaan,
Piyaar ke kakhshaan leti thi angdayee jahan,
Mod nafrat ke usee rah guzar mein aaye,
Dharam kya unka hae, kya zaat hae, yeh janta kaun?
Ghar na jalta tau unhe raat mein pehchanta kaun,
Ghar jalane ko mera, log jo ghar mein aaye,
Shakahari hae mere dost tumahara khanjar.*

*Tumne Babar kee taraf pheke thhe saare patthar
Hae mere sar ki khata zakhm jo sar mein aaye,
Paun Sarjoo mein aabhi Ram ne dhoye bhee na thhe
Ke nazar aaye wahan khoon ke gehre dhabbe,
Paun dhoye bina Sarjoo ke kinare se uthe,
Ram yeh kehte hue aapne dwaare se uthe,
Rajdhani kee fiza aayee nahin raas mujhe,
6 December ko mila doosra banwaas mujhe.*

A rough translation:

The Second Exile

*That evening when Lord Ram returned to his home
He remembered the jungles where he had spent his years
of exile
When he must have seen the dance of madness that
December 6*

*It must have crossed his mind
From where have so many demented ones landed on my
home*

*Wherever he had stepped and his footprints had shone
The river waters where thousands of stars of love meandered
Instead now took turns of violence and hatred
What is their religion, what is their caste, who knows?
Had the house not burnt, who would have known the faces
Of those who came to burn my house
Your sword, my friend, is vegetarian.*

*You threw towards Babar all the stones
It is my head's fault that, instead, it bleeds
Lord Ram had not even washed his feet in the Saryu waters
When he saw deep blots of blood.
Getting up without washing his feet in the waters
Lord Ram left the precincts of his own residence, bemoaning,
The state of my own capital city no longer suits me
This December 6, I have been condemned to a second exile*



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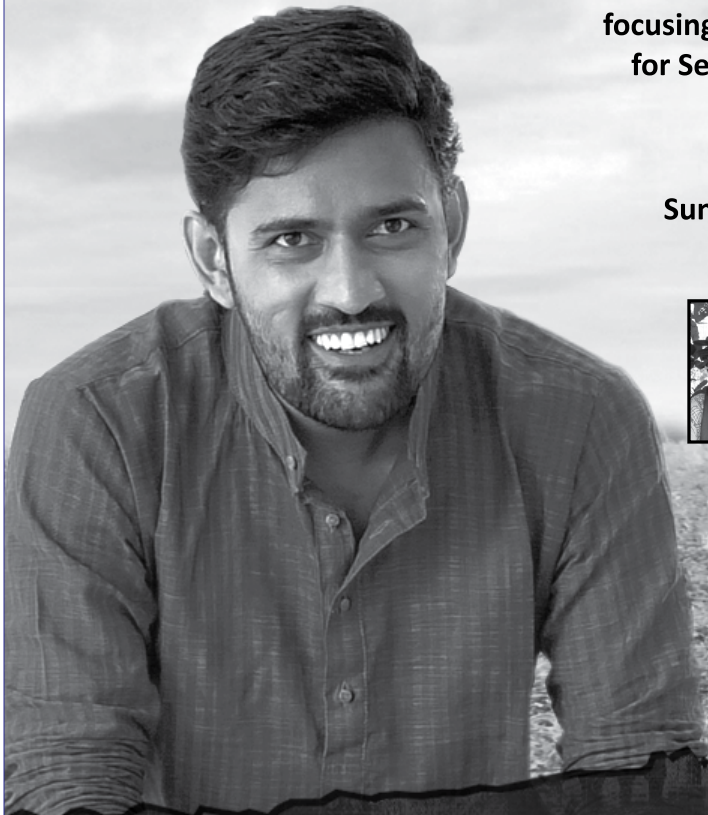
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Wars Never Produce Answers

Admiral (retd.) L. Ramdas

Laxminarayan Ramdas, a retired admiral of the Indian Navy, served as the chief of naval staff between 1990 and 1993. Over a phone conversation with Surabhi Kanga, the web editor at 'The Caravan', Ramdas discussed India's response to the militant attack on a Central Reserve Police Force convoy in Pulwama, in Jammu and Kashmir, on 14 February, in which over forty personnel were killed. Pakistan-based extremist group Jaish-e-Mohammed claimed responsibility for the attack. Twelve days after the Pulwama attack, the Indian Air Force carried out an air strike in Jabba, a village near the Balakot town in Pakistan's Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, followed by a dogfight with Pakistan's air force the next day.

I am very disappointed with what is happening in India at the moment. It is not that the government lacked understanding about the cost of this retaliation when we went ahead with our aerial strike on Balakot, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, on 26 February. This entailed crossing the Pakistani border, into its territory, and not in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. We started the whole escalation process actually, nothing

to do with [Pakistan]—no amount of whitewash will change that.

We struck Pakistan using the justification that we had incontrovertible intelligence that more strikes similar to Pulwama by the Jaish-e-Mohammed, were imminent. Similarly, Pakistan can strike any target in India giving reasons why they had to take anticipatory measures based on their own intelligence. What is the guarantee that tomorrow they will not come and strike XYZ in Mumbai or Delhi or any other place of their choosing?

The Pulwama attack was tragic and should never have happened. The culprits must be brought to book. But using Pulwama as the rationale, we are now extending the blame to Kashmiris as a whole—especially Kashmiri students, in many parts of the country. Soon after the Pulwama attack, on 20 February, I wrote a letter to the president of India, suggesting that we take the “high moral ground” by declaring “an unconditional Hold Fire” pending a detailed enquiry into the attack. My letter also recommended immediate action by the prime minister and top leaders to halt the media war against

innocent Kashmiris across India.

I also added that India should initiate a dialogue with Pakistan, and with the people of Jammu and Kashmir. We claim Jammu and Kashmir to be ours—that is perfectly alright, that is what our legal accession document states. But the legal accession document also says many other things on which we have reneged.

Seventy years down the line neither India nor Pakistan have been able to settle this issue, so there must be something wrong with us or something wrong with them. If you ask me, both of us are stupid to spend so much money on this conflict and to achieve nothing. And these fights have continued for three or four generations. The suicide bomber, Adil Ahmed Dar, who is allegedly a Jaish-e-Mohammed operator, is a clear indicator of the levels of anger and alienation that the youth of Jammu and Kashmir are experiencing today. We claim the whole area to be ours but we do not treat the people with the same kind of love and affection as we should, as we do in the rest of the country. This is the reason for the continuing tensions and growth of militancy—be it in Kashmir or in the Northeast.

Wars never produce answers. I have been in two wars myself—a small action we carried out in Goa in 1961, and then in 1971 in the Bangladesh operations against Pakistan—and I should know. Right now, the situation is serious because escalation is dangerously simple. It can just keep spiralling upwards until you reach the very top of the ladder—India and Pakistan both have nuclear weapons. One cannot

say, “Well, I will just use tactical weapons.” What is the guarantee that the other will not retaliate with a bigger weapon, or vice versa? In battle, we say, if you throw a stone at me, I will shoot you. That is the thing we are saying even now—if children throw stones at me in Srinagar, I will shoot them with pellets and blind them for life. This is no way to win the hearts and minds of our own people.

The fact that we are soon heading into a national election in the country is very critical to understanding the many factors at play today. If I were to advise the government on the next few steps, the first thing that should be done is to blow the whistle and say, “I am going to declare a unilateral ceasefire,” and then, for God’s sake, let us get around a table and talk.

This situation is worse than during the Kargil war in 1999. In 1998, both sides had demonstrated their nuclear capability—India in Pokhran, and Pakistan in the Chagai hills. But today, the scene is very different. We have more weapons on both sides and each one believes that they are very strong. Meanwhile, the United States president Donald Trump, whose country has the largest number of weapons, met Kim Jong-un, his North Korean counterpart, in an attempt to sign a peace agreement. Why? Because North Korea has shown that it has nuclear-weapon capability. Yet, we are gung-ho and encouraging the mindless celebration of the strikes.

You cannot carry on this cat-and-mouse game. We need to ask the question: who benefits from keeping the hostilities alive and the pot boiling? The arms lobby, the

suppliers and dealers at home and abroad. They find a profitable market in India and Pakistan, and one which can be easily milked. By keeping us as permanent enemies, it is they who reap the benefit. If Pakistan wants arms, it gets them from China and various other Western countries. We are buying sophisticated weaponry from Israel, America, Russia and France for huge sums of money, while the poorest of both countries remain poor. We have become puppets in the hands of the big warmongers, the chaps who sells us our weapons and equipment. Then they blame our neighbour, he blames us, and we blame him. It is a great strategy that they have going on. We must understand who are pulling the strings and raking in huge profits. Let us be clear, it is neither India, nor Pakistan, nor the Kashmiris. This is not the subcontinent we want.

India cannot be dragged into a war with all the dangers of escalation by a so-called “popular” demand by the people. The top leaders of the country have failed in their responsibility to educate, explain and inform the people of the real dangers of inciting two nuclear-capable neighbours to war. It is even more important to reign in the TV anchors and social media, to emphasise that war is not something to celebrate. As a former chief of the navy and proud member of our armed forces, it has not been easy to advocate peace and dialogue in this belligerent atmosphere. I, too, have been trolled and accused of being a *deshdrohi*, or anti-national, for my views in favour of nuclear disarmament and regional peace.

The social-media trolls and the

anchors are not those who will lose their lives. It appears that we are witnessing the whipping up of an ultra-nationalism and an ugly form of political manipulation to serve immediate electoral mobilisation. This is the most dangerous undermining of democracy, and it

is letting down the armed forces and those soldiers, sailors and airmen who have put their lives on the line every time. Let us respond positively to all possibilities of dialogue, which may enable long-term solutions in a calmer and less inflammatory environment.

Working for peace requires a different kind of courage, commitment and following the dictates of one's conscience. To quote my friend and mentor, the late social activist Nirmala Deshpande, "*Goli Nahin, Boli Chahiye*" (Dialogue, Not Guns).

Unorganised Sector: Falling Fortunes

Arun Kumar

The pressure-cooker manufacturer Prestige reported soaring profits last year, as did its primary rivals in the cookware market. But the good news for these companies came with bad news for the economy. The chairperson of Prestige told *The Hindu* that increased profits had come hand in hand with a fall in competition from the unorganised sector. "There are three or four organised players" in the industry, he said, listing a few rival brands. "The rest are all unorganised." Since the government had implemented the goods and services tax, or GST, "the unorganised competition is reducing."

Official data claims that the Indian economy is growing at more than 7 percent per annum. But unofficial data contradicts that contention. A recent survey by the All India Manufacturers' Organisation revealed that the economy has not yet recovered from the blows of demonetisation and the GST. The survey, based on data from 34,700 of the AIMO's 300,000 member units, showed that the number of jobs in micro and small enterprises had declined by roughly a third since 2014. In medium-scale enterprises,

about a quarter of jobs had been lost, and among traders the decline was over 40 percent. Data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, a business-intelligence firm, shows a loss of 11 million jobs last year, most of them in the largely unorganised rural economy. Between 2004 and 2007, when the economy was actually growing at 7 or 8 percent, there was a clear "feel good" factor across both the organised and unorganised sectors, and almost all segments and industries did well. Today, large sections of society—farmers, traders, young people, and many more—are protesting. Recently, more than 25 million people applied for 90,000 relatively low-level positions in the railways. The desperate applicants included holders of engineering, business and commerce degrees.

The dissonance between the government's claim of 7-percent-plus growth and the lack of a "feel good" sentiment is explained by vastly different rates of growth between the organised and the unorganised sectors. But that crucial difference is not reflected in official numbers, partly for methodological reasons.

The government collects data

on growth in the unorganised sector once every five years. The last time it did this was in 2015. In the years between successive datasets, official numbers for the unorganised sector are calculated on the basis of various assumptions. For example, there are projections based on figures from the preceding year, and on data on the organised sector—on the assumptions that old trends persist, and that the organised and unorganised sectors share similar fortunes. These assumptions are valid if the economy does not face a structural break.

Such assumptions do not hold anymore. Demonetisation hurt the organised sector much less than the unorganised sector, since the latter is far more dependent on cash. The GST has also had a disproportionate impact on unorganised enterprises, even though they are exempted from registering for it. GST compliance in the organised sector has forced the digitisation of business transactions, and a preference for organised-sector suppliers. The informal sector has struggled to deal with the reconfigured complexities and priorities, and so lost lucrative contacts with the organised sector. In the wake of these shocks, the

organised sector can no longer serve as a proxy for the unorganised sector, and old numbers have no connection to the new reality.

Worse, the official method used to calculate the government's quarterly growth estimates is based only on data from the corporate sector. These do not even fully represent the organised sector, since the corporate sector is only one part of it. Further, if the organised sector is growing at the expense of the unorganised sector, as seems to be the case, then the former cannot at all represent the latter.

All of this implies that the economy's rate of growth is nowhere close to what the government claims it is. If we take the official word for this, the organised sector, which accounts for 55 percent of gross domestic product, is growing at 7 percent; and agriculture, which is part of the unorganised sector and accounts for about 14 percent of GDP, is growing at around 3 percent. For the non-agricultural unorganised sector, which accounts for the remaining 31 percent of GDP, the scale of job losses shown in the studies cited above points to a decline of at least 10 percent, even by a conservative estimate. If all this is added up proportionately, the overall rate of growth only comes to around 1 percent. This is the true measure of the post-demonetisation and post-GST economy.

This reality—that the unorganised sector is in sharp decline—accounts for many of the adverse symptoms that the economy shows today. Consider the crisis of joblessness. The unorganised sector employs 93 percent of the workforce. If it declines, employment gets hit. Growth in the organised sector creates few jobs, since it is highly

automated. Take the example of local retail stores competing against e-commerce, reported to be growing at 30 percent per annum. The automated operations of Amazon, Flipkart, Big Bazaar and the like need far fewer workers to accomplish the same amount of work compared to unorganised retailers. Further, if the organised sector grows at the expense of the unorganised sector, the result is a net decrease in jobs—hence the millions of desperate job-seekers amid an official growth rate of 7 percent.

The decline in unorganised employment is reflected in the high demand for work under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme since demonetisation. In the last three budgets, the government has had to increase the budget allocation for the scheme, from Rs 38,000 crore to Rs 48,000 crore to Rs 55,000 crore. Now, a supplementary demand for another Rs 6,000 crore has raised the total allocation for the current budget year to Rs 61,000 crore. Those who have lost jobs in urban areas have gone back to their villages to seek work. The fact that demand for rural employment remains so high implies that the lost urban jobs have not returned.

The decimation of non-agricultural unorganised employment has contributed to a host of other problems, including agrarian distress. Mass demand for food and basic commodities comes in large part from the overwhelmingly large number of people who depend on the unorganised sector. As their incomes have declined, so has that demand. Low demand has helped depress agricultural prices, which collapsed as a result of demonetisation and have failed to recover even after the immediate impact of that shock

waned.

The timing of demonetisation—in November 2016, between the kharif harvest and the sowing of the rabi crop—meant that in large parts of northern India, farmers could not sell their produce, because traders did not have the cash to pay. Farmers' lack of cash delayed purchases of seeds and other crucial inputs, and pushed back the planting of the next crop. Many farmers had to borrow at high cost to buy inputs and fulfil family needs. In all of this, their costs rose. Consequently, farmers' incomes were pincered by falling prices and rising costs. Their inability to repay debts has intensified the demand for loan waivers in state after state. It might also have caused a rise in farmers' suicides—the government has not been publishing data on these for the past two years.

The ripple effect spreads further and further. Data from the Reserve Bank of India shows that for several years now, capacity utilisation in the organised sector is hovering between 70 and 75 percent. This is another consequence of slack demand due to the decline of the unorganised sector. Investment, in turn, depends on capacity utilisation—if companies have spare capacity, they invest little, since more investment would lead to higher unutilised capacity and, as a result, greater losses. Official figures show that investment in the economy, as reflected in gross capital formation, peaked at about 39 percent of GDP in the 2011–12 financial year, and dropped to about 32 percent of GDP in 2017–18. CMIE data shows that demonetisation led to a sharp decline in investment. Confusion and difficulties arising from the GST also exacerbated the problem.

Low demand is also reflected in poor credit offtake, or borrowing, from banks—an indicator of low production and investment in the economy. Credit offtake declined sharply in December 2016, right after demonetisation. It has recovered since then, but not to the levels seen before the present government took power.

There is another aspect to today's credit woes—the massive burden on banks from non-performing assets. Loan defaults have risen not only due to distress in the unorganised sector, but also, at a much larger scale, due to low overall growth hampering businesses, as well as due to crony capitalism. Many NPAs are linked to the infrastructure sector, including things such as power projects. Companies have created high-cost infrastructure that is not profitable in a poor country. The credit given to such projects often shows a lack of due diligence by banks, encouraged by political cronyism. The high ratio of NPAs has reduced banks' ability to lend until they can fix the problem. Non-banking financial companies, or NBFCs—the so-called “shadow lenders”—have also faced a crisis of bad loans, and have had to reduce lending. Micro and small enterprises have had to raise funds from the high-cost informal money market—putting another dent in profitability.

The difficulty is that companies that should be investing in the economy are highly indebted, and so ineligible to borrow, and banks are struggling to collect debts, and so unable to lend. This twin balance-sheet problem is further hurting growth, which is already in a quagmire due to the decline of the unorganised sector.

The low rate of growth has led to a tussle between the government

and the Reserve Bank of India. The government wants the RBI to boost investment by cutting interest rates, and, by going soft on NPAs, to enable banks to lend. It has also wanted the RBI to offer relief for NBFCs, and to transfer reserve funds to government coffers, so as to fund likely giveaways in anticipation of the coming election. The RBI has so far been reluctant to oblige.

The current government's economic policies have left the country in a very precarious situation. Besides the internal instability arising from the declining unorganised sector, there is now also external instability arising from global markets. One source of this instability is the United States' escalating trade war. Another is the turmoil in numerous countries that supply the world with oil and gas. Many of these are confronted by war and social crises—Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Venezuela—and others, such as Russia and Iran, are facing international sanctions. When global petroleum prices rose sharply, India, which imports roughly 80 percent of its petroleum products, saw increased inflation and a rising trade deficit. These two factors led to a sharp devaluation of the rupee vis-à-vis the dollar, which further aggravated inflation. The situation was threatening to get out of hand, until petroleum prices declined in the last few months.

In the past, internal economic stability provided India with a buffer against such external shocks, but now that buffer is gone. Instead, we have two diverging circles of growth—one growing at the expense of the other—and a growth rate of around 1 percent, with all the social and political tumult that this brings. To add to this, the government's

pressure on the RBI, which led to the sudden resignation of the central bank's last governor and the appointment of another in quick time, also points to a weakening of the institution. One lesson from demonetisation, when the last RBI governor meekly watched the disaster unfold just months after his appointment, is that a new governor does the government's bidding while finding their feet in the job. It is true that the RBI does not have absolute autonomy, but its independence is important. A strong RBI with strong reserves, able to effect difficult corrective measures when needed, is a crucial safeguard for a besieged economy. If that safeguard is also gone, any fresh shocks to the economy, whether internal or external, could have dire results.

(Arun Kumar was formerly a professor of economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University.)

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Gandhian Engagement with Capital

Pannalal Surana

These days, much is being written and spoken about Gandhi's thoughts. However, I have a feeling that very little space is given to his economic views.

Recently, Chaitra Redkar, HoD, Political Science at SNDT University, Mumbai has contributed a wonderful book on this subject, *Gandhian Engagement with Capital: Perspectives of J.C. Kumarappa*. This is an attempt to introduce this book to readers of Janata. She summarises Gandhi's economic thoughts as follows:

1. Though Gandhi used religious idioms, he did not mean ritualistic or hierarchical religion.
2. His contention was that economics should be coupled with ethics.
3. The test to be applied to any economic principle is the goodness of its effect on the world.
4. Primacy should be accorded to individual's preferences as modified reflections and corrected by knowledge and experiences and regulated by ethical principles. Wants should be restricted to the minimum and Swadeshi should be adhered to.
5. Altruism and charity as principles of macroeconomic policies. But Gandhi also warns against misplaced benevolence .e.g. laziness should not be tolerated.
6. Everyone should engage in manual labour. Manual labour is good for psychological and moral health.
7. Fundamental rights as adopted by the Karachi Congress 1931

should be accepted as broad framework of running the polity.

Gandhi was opposed to western culture based on large scale industries because it was exploitative and furthered widening disparity between classes. Colonialism propelled by capitalism was oppressive. Later on, this point is elaborated by his staunch follower, J.C. Kumarappa. He argued that mechanised large scale industries are utilising natural resources recklessly and causing great harm to the environment. Also they led to wars.

While studying economics at universities in England and USA, Kumarappa got acquainted with Marxism and also the non-Marxist critique of market economy. Back in India, he met Gandhi in 1928 and was assigned the task of supervising land revenue survey of Matar taluka in Kheda district, Gujarat. He found that the assessment was exorbitant. Later, Sardar Patel launched a satyagraha asking the peasants not to pay land revenue. Kumarappa forcefully pleaded that the colonial rule was causing unemployment in rural areas and augmenting poverty.

Thereafter, Kumarappa concentrated on the issue of poverty alleviation. He formulated the model of reforming agriculture, which was the mainstay of Indian economy, and developing village industries. About agriculture, he pleaded for abolition of zamindari or rather elimination of all unproductive and parasitic middlemen. He suggested that a mutilpe cooperative society should prepare a cropping plan for the whole village or rather for a

cluster of villages. He was in favour of food crops and was opposed to cash crops, which, he felt, led to making the peasant dependent on the market and money, both of which are exploitative. Today, one may not agree with his total opposition to cash crops, but the policy of formulating a cropping plan suggested by him needs to be accepted so as to protect peasants from the vagaries of the market.

Kumarappa also suggested that the State should provide adequate irrigation facilities to farms.

Kumarappa also stressed on the importance of reviving village industries, and also emphasised on the need to help them improve their efficiency. He visualised that small communities should aspire to be self-sufficient. Of course, behind this thinking, there was the presumption that people would like to follow the axiom of simple living. It is possible to have adequate production of goods required to satisfy the basic needs of all people in the area by utilising locally available resources, and local manpower. This emphasis on local small scale industries should make it possible to provide full employment to all the people.

Of course, Kumarappa was aware of the fact that a few large scale industries will be needed. For example, it is desirable to use large scale industry to produce paper pulp needed for production of handmade paper. However, it was his firm opinion that large scale industries must be run by the State.

Kumarappa was very worried about the role of money. In his

opinion, it was mainly responsible for linking rural people to the market economy. One would like to agree with him. But use of money cannot be totally dispensed with because it is a suitable medium of exchange. Nevertheless, attention needs to be devoted to preventing accumulation of money in a few hands.

The usual criticism leveled at the Gandhian model is that it is utopian and impracticable. Thanks to the policies followed during the last thirty years, large scale industries, owned by capitalists, both foreign as well as indigenous, have come to dominate our economy. Can we put the clock back?

But instead of attempting an answer, let us face the question: Can large scale industry and capitalism last forever?

It needs to be noted that capitalism has aggravated three problems:

1. Global warming is threatening the very existence of human life on earth.
2. High rate of unemployment in both developed and developing countries.
3. Great disparity in income and wealth. In our country, 1% of population is now controlling 58% of the country's wealth.

Would the vast multitudes meekly suffer under the pressure of unemployment and inequality for ever? History is replete with examples of rebellion.

We are human beings endowed with urges for freedom and self-respect. We cannot suffer inhuman treatment indefinitely. Instead of inviting bloody uprisings, we should tread the path of sanity. It is time to prepare ourselves for following the Gandhian model of sustainable economy with suitable changes and modifications.

Why Food Security Is So Essential For All

Mohan Guruswamy

Late last year, two young men decided to live a month of their lives on the income of an average poor Indian. One of them, Tushar, the son of a police officer in Haryana, studied at the University of Pennsylvania and worked for three years as an investment banker in the US and Singapore. The other, Matt, migrated as a teenager to the United States with his parents, and studied in MIT. Both decided at different points to return to India, joined the UID Project in Bengaluru, came to share a flat, and became close friends.

The idea suddenly struck them one day. Both had returned to India in the vague hope that they could be of use to their country. But they knew the people of this land so little. Tushar suggested one evening—"Let us try to understand an 'average Indian', by living on an 'average income'." His friend Matt was immediately captured by the idea. They began a journey which would change them forever.

To begin with, what was the average income of an Indian? They calculated that India's Mean National Income was Rs 4,500 a month, or Rs 150 a day. Globally, people spend about a third of their incomes on rent. Excluding rent, they decided to spend Rs 100 each a day. They realised that this did not make them poor, only average. Seventy-five per cent Indians live on less than this average.

The young men moved into the tiny apartment of their domestic help, much to her bemusement. What changed for them was that they spent a large part of their day

planning and organising their food. Eating out was out of the question; even dhabas were too expensive. Milk and yoghurt were expensive and therefore used sparingly, meat was out of bounds, as were processed food like bread. No ghee or butter, only a little refined oil. Both were passionate cooks with healthy appetites. They found soy nuggets a wonder food—affordable and high on proteins, and worked on many recipes. Parle-G biscuits again were cheap: 25 paise for 27 calories! They innovated a dessert of fried banana on biscuits. It was their treat each day.

Living on Rs 100 made the circle of their life much smaller. They found that they could not afford to travel by bus more than five km in a day. If they needed to go further, they could only walk. They could afford electricity only five or six hours a day, therefore sparingly used lights and fans. They needed also to charge their mobiles and computers. One Lifebuoy soap cut into two. They passed by shops, gazing at things they could not buy. They could not afford the movies, and hoped they would not fall ill.

However, the bigger challenge remained. Could they live on Rs 32, the official poverty line, which had become controversial after India's Planning Commission informed the Supreme Court that this was the poverty line for cities (for villages it was even lower, at Rs 26 per person per day)?

Harrowing experience

For this, they decided to go to

Matt's ancestral village Karucachal in Kerala, and live on Rs 26. They ate parboiled rice, a tuber and banana and drank black tea: a balanced diet was impossible on the Rs 26 a day which their briefly adopted 'poverty' permitted. They found themselves thinking of food the whole day. They walked long distances, and saved money even on soap to wash their clothes. They could not afford communication, by mobile and internet. It would have been a disaster if they fell ill. For the two 26-year-olds, the experience of 'official poverty' was harrowing.

Yet, when their experiment ended with Deepavali, they wrote to their friends:

Wish we could tell you that we are happy to have our 'normal' lives back. Wish we could say that our sumptuous celebratory feast two nights ago was as satisfying as we had been hoping for throughout our experiment. It probably was one of the best meals we've ever had, packed with massive amounts of love from our hosts. However, each bite was a sad reminder of the harsh reality that there are 400 million people in our country for whom such a meal will remain a dream for quite some time. That we can move on to our comfortable life, but they remain in the battlefield of survival—a life of tough choices and tall constraints. A life where freedom means little and hunger is plenty . . .

It disturbs us to spend money on most of the things that we now consider excesses. Do we really need that hair product or that branded cologne? Is dining out at expensive restaurants necessary for a happy weekend? At a larger level, do we deserve all the riches we have around us? Is it just plain luck that

we were born into circumstances that allowed us to build a life of comfort? What makes the other half any less deserving of many of these material possessions, (which many of us consider essential) or, more importantly, tools for self-development (education) or self-preservation (healthcare)?

We don't know the answers to these questions. But we do know the feeling of guilt that is with us now. Guilt that is compounded by the love and generosity we got from people who live on the other side, despite their tough lives. We may

have treated them as strangers all our lives, but they surely didn't treat us as that way . . .

So what did these two friends learn from their brief encounter with poverty? That hunger can make you angry. That a food law which guarantees adequate nutrition to all is essential. That poverty does not allow you to realise even modest dreams. And above all—in Matt's words—that empathy is essential for democracy.

(The writer is Chairman, Centre for Policy Alternatives, New Delhi.)

In Response to Lies and Hate, Let Me Make Some Things Clear About My Climate Strike

Greta Thunberg

Originally posted to Facebook, the following is a statement from 16-year-old Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg as a response to circulating "rumours and lies" as well as "enormous amounts of hate" directed at her as a result of her role inspiring the growing youth-led climate strike movement.

Recently I've seen many rumours circulating about me and enormous amounts of hate. This is no surprise to me. I know that since most people are not aware of the full meaning of the climate crisis (which is understandable since it has never been treated as a crisis), a school strike for the climate would seem very strange to people in general.

So let me make some things clear about my school strike.

In May 2018 I was one of the winners in a writing competition about the environment held by *Svenska Dagbladet*, a Swedish

newspaper. I got my article published and some people contacted me, among others was Bo Thorén from Fossil Free Dalsland. He had some kind of group with people, especially youth, who wanted to do something about the climate crisis.

I had a few phone meetings with other activists. The purpose was to come up with ideas of new projects that would bring attention to the climate crisis. Bo had a few ideas of things we could do. Everything from marches to a loose idea of some kind of a school strike (that school children would do something on the schoolyards or in the classrooms). That idea was inspired by the Parkland Students, who had refused to go to school after the school shootings.

I liked the idea of a school strike. So I developed that idea and tried to get the other young people to join me, but no one was really interested.

They thought that a Swedish version of the Zero Hour march was going to have a bigger impact. So I went on planning the school strike all by myself and after that I didn't participate in any more meetings.

When I told my parents about my plans they weren't very fond of it. They did not support the idea of school striking and they said that if I were to do this I would have to do it completely by myself and with no support from them.

On August 20, 2018 I sat down outside the Swedish Parliament. I handed out fliers with a long list of facts about the climate crisis and explanations on why I was striking. The first thing I did was to post on Twitter and Instagram what I was doing and it soon went viral. Then journalists and newspapers started to come. A Swedish entrepreneur and business man active in the climate movement, Ingmar Rentzhog, was among the first to arrive. He spoke with me and took pictures that he posted on Facebook. That was the first time I had ever met or spoken with him. I had not communicated or encountered with him ever before.

Many people love to spread rumours saying that I have people "behind me" or that I'm being "paid" or "used" to do what I'm doing. But there is no one "behind" me except for myself. My parents were as far from climate activists as possible before I made them aware of the situation.

I am not part of any organisation. I sometimes support and cooperate with several NGOs that work with the climate and environment. But I am absolutely independent and I only represent myself. And I do what I do completely for free, I have not received any money or any promise of future payments in any form at all.

And nor has anyone linked to me or my family done so.

And of course it will stay this way. I have not met one single climate activist who is fighting for the climate for money. That idea is completely absurd.

Furthermore, I only travel with permission from my school and my parents pay for tickets and accommodations.

My family has written a book together about our family and how me and my sister Beata have influenced my parents way of thinking and seeing the world, especially when it comes to the climate. And about our diagnoses. That book was due to be released in May. But since there was a major disagreement with the book company, we ended up changing to a new publisher and so the book was released in August instead.

Before the book was released my parents made it clear that their possible profits from the book, "Scener ur hjärtat," will be going to eight different charities working with environment, children with diagnoses, and animal rights.

And yes, I write my own speeches. But since I know that what I say is going to reach many, many people I often ask for input. I also have a few scientists that I frequently ask for help on how to express certain complicated matters. I want everything to be absolutely correct so that I don't spread incorrect facts, or things that can be misunderstood.

Some people mock me for my diagnosis. But Asperger is not a disease, it's a gift. People also say that since I have Asperger I couldn't possibly have put myself in this position. But that's exactly why I did this. Because if I would have been "normal" and social I would have organised myself in an organisation,

or started an organisation by myself. But since I am not that good at socialising I did this instead. I was so frustrated that nothing was being done about the climate crisis and I felt like I had to do something, anything. And sometimes NOT doing things—like just sitting down outside the parliament—speaks much louder than doing things. Just like a whisper sometimes is louder than shouting.

Also there is one complaint that I "sound and write like an adult." And to that I can only say; don't you think that a 16-year old can speak for herself? There's also some people who say that I oversimplify things. For example when I say that "the climate crisis is a black and white issue"; "we need to stop the emissions of greenhouse gases"; and "I want you to panic." But that I only say because it's true. Yes, the climate crisis is the most complex issue that we have ever faced and it's going to take everything from our part to "stop it." But the solution is black and white; we need to stop the emissions of greenhouse gases.

Because either we limit the warming to 1.5°C over pre-industrial levels, or we don't. Either we reach a tipping point where we start a chain reaction with events way beyond human control, or we don't. Either we go on as a civilisation, or we don't. There are no gray areas when it comes to survival.

And when I say that I want you to panic I mean that we need to treat the crisis as a crisis. When your house is on fire you don't sit down and talk about how nice you can rebuild it once you put out the fire. If your house is on fire you run outside and make sure that everyone is out while you call the fire department. That requires some level of panic.

There is one other argument that I can't do anything about. And that is the fact that I'm "just a child and we shouldn't be listening to children." But that is easily fixed—just start to listen to the rock solid science instead. Because if everyone listened to the scientists and the facts that I constantly refer to—then no one would have to listen to me or any of the other hundreds of thousands of school children on strike for the climate across the world. Then we could all go back to school.

I am just a messenger, and yet I get all this hate. I am not saying anything new, I am just saying what scientists have repeatedly said for decades. And I agree with you, I'm too young to do this. We children shouldn't have to do this. But since almost no one is doing anything, and our very future is at risk, we feel like we have to continue.

And thank you everyone for your kind support!

It brings me hope.

[Greta Thunberg (born 3 January 2003) is a 16-year-old Swedish school girl working to stop global warming and climate change. In August 2018, she started the first school strike for climate outside the Swedish parliament building – a movement which has spread across Europe. As of December 2018, more than 20,000 students had held strikes in at least 270 cities.]

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is available at
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World Court: US Base on Diego Garcia Illegal

The US airbase on the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia is among the most crucial and heavily used of the many hundreds of US bases around the world. It has been used extensively in the wars waged by the United States against Iraq and Afghanistan, in the attacks against Syria and Yemen, in the CIA's torture "rendition" flights, and in a range of other intelligence and military operations.

Diego Garcia is the primary island of the Chagos group, previously dependencies of the British colony of Mauritius. But immediately prior to Mauritius gaining its independence, and as the International Court of Justice at The Hague decided on February 25, 2019, in violation of international law, the UK government separated the Chagos Islands from the colony of Mauritius. The sole purpose was in order to give Diego Garcia to the United States on a long-term lease. The inhabitants were forcibly removed by the UK, and prevented from returning.

Over the years the former inhabitants in vain sought redress from the British legal system, winning repeatedly in the courts but in the end losing in the House of Lords on, in essence, national security ("royal prerogative"!) grounds.

Of course the real player was the United States, which conspired with its British satellite at every stage of the struggle. At one point, in 2009, the US feared that even the docile Law Lords might permit the islanders—victims of a shameful injustice—to return to some of the islands. The Obama administration

and its British puppets came up with a solution: the declaration of an environmental "maritime protected zone" prohibiting any civilian access. A disgusting bit of hypocrisy so very typical of its authors.

But with the ICJ opinion, this play is nearly over. No doubt the US possession of Diego Garcia will not soon end and the Chagos islanders will not soon go home, but the brand of a cruel and blatant violation of international law has been fixed for all time. Great credit goes to the international lawyers who have laboured for decades without compensation for the impoverished and exiled islanders. Credit too goes to the government of Mauritius, which gathered its courage to resist the fierce pressure exerted by the United States to drop its efforts on behalf of the Chagossians. And credit to the fourteen justices of the Hague court, who have reason to be proud of reaching a decision that gives a moment of hope in dark times, and with but one dissent—by the US justice, surprise!

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Press Release**PCN Statement on Supreme Court of India FRA decision**

The People's Climate Network (PCN) is dismayed by the recent order, on 13 February, of the Supreme Court of India directing that forest dwellers whose claims for rights under the Forest Rights Act, 2006 have been rejected, be summarily evicted. The Chief Secretary of each concerned state government has been directed to ensure that "eviction will be carried out on or before the next date of hearing" (24 July). This order potentially affects the lives and livelihoods of over a million Adivasis and other forest dwellers across 16 states in this country. It runs contrary to the provisions of the Indian Constitution. Instead of putting pressure on the States to correctly implement the Forest Rights Act (2006) (FRA) including a review of the rejected claims via due process, and enforcement of the right to appeal, the Supreme Court ruling undermines the FRA, whose enactment and process of implementation is a consequence of several years of people's struggles.

Forests form the ecological base on which all life on earth is supported. The presence of forests are vital as a carbon sink, in halting soil erosion, in preventing sedimentation and siltation of rivers and in maintaining soil fertility. They are also home to indigenous communities all across India and in other parts of the world. India is a signatory to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which urges member states to "move forward together on the path of human rights, justice and development for all."

The Forest Rights Act, 2006 was enacted in this spirit, but the

recent Supreme Court order to evict over a million Adivasis is in direct contravention of the UN Declaration. It is rather shameful that the Government of India did not launch a vigorous defence of the FRA, which protects the rights of the most vulnerable people of India. Instead, through its silence, it backed the position of the petitioners who believe that Adivasi communities do not belong in the forest.

If so, the petitioners, the Government of India and the Supreme Court are in error. There's no contradiction between the protection of forests and the rights of Adivasis since we know that indigenous communities have been the most important stewards of forests everywhere in the world. While the main petitioner in the recent Supreme Court order on forest rights—Wildlife First—believes that the presence of Adivasi communities in forests is a danger, the truth is otherwise. A recent study by the Wildlife Conservation Society along with the University of Queensland, Charles Darwin University, University of Maryland, and others shows that "Indigenous Peoples are critical to maintaining intact forest landscapes that are essential for avoiding catastrophic climate change."

Therefore, we find it mystifying that the Supreme Court of India has directed the eviction of over 1 million forest dwellers in the name of conservation. The Supreme Court order sets a dangerous precedent for continued erosion of our environment.

The order carries the potential

danger of further making way for the exploitation of our forests and forest lands by large companies, other commercial interests, and the state. This would have deeply hazardous implications for people's livelihoods, their access to forests and the commons, and carries the danger of polluting rivers, water bodies, the soil and groundwater. Such intensified deforestation also directly contributes further to global warming, by both destroying and reducing a carbon sink and adding to carbon dioxide emissions from deforestation.

- We believe that this order is deeply flawed; it's a grievous injustice to Adivasi communities and it's the wrong approach to mitigate ecological destruction and climate change. Therefore, the People's Climate Network strongly condemns the Supreme Court decision to evict forest communities. It supports the FRA 2006 and stands in solidarity with individuals and groups who defend the forests. It calls for an independent investigation into the States' lack of due process in implementing the FRA, including claimants' right to appeal. PCN feels that full implementation of FRA and the protection of the rights of the indigenous people under PESA and Schedule V is the only way to bring justice and simultaneously protect the forests.
- It stands in support and solidarity with the rights of forest dwellers who live within them and protect and regenerate them—to uphold their dignity, culture, sovereignty

and livelihoods and it will work with like-minded individuals and organisations in India and abroad to restore justice to the Adivasis of India. PCN believes that the fortress model of conservation on display in the petition and the order need to be replaced by a rights-based approach that protects Adivasi and other forest-based communities and the forests they inhabit.

(Editor's note: Responding to the nationwide protests against the order, on February 28, the Supreme Court stayed the implementation of its earlier order evicting more than 10 lakh families of Adivasis and other forest-dwellers from forest lands across 16 states.)

A Teenage War Resister in Israel

Rory Fanning

Hilel Garmi's phone is going straight to voicemail and all I'm hoping is that he's not back in prison. I'll soon learn that he is.

Prison 6 is a military prison. It's situated in the Israeli coastal town of Atlit, a short walk from the Mediterranean Sea and less than an hour's drive from Hilel's home. It was constructed in 1957 following the Sinai War between Israel and Egypt to house disciplinary cases from the Israeli Defense Forces, or IDF.

Hilel has already been locked up six times. "I can smell the sea from my cell, especially at night when everything is quiet," he tells me in one of our phone conversations. I'm 6,000 miles away in Chicago, but Hilel and I have regularly been discussing his ordeal as an Israeli war resister, so it makes me nervous that, this time around, I can't reach him at all.

A recent high-school graduate with dark hair and a big smile, he's only 19 and still lives with his parents in Yodfat, an Israeli town of less than 900 people in the northern part of the country. It's 155 miles to Damascus (if such a trip were possible, which, of course, it isn't), a two-hour drive down the coast to Tel Aviv, and a four-hour drive to besieged Gaza.

Yodfat itself could be a set for a Biblical movie, with its dry rolling hills, ancient ruins, and pastoral landscape. The town exports flower bulbs, as well as organic goat cheese, and notably supports the Misgav Waldorf School that Hilel's mother helped found. Hilel is proud of his

mom. After all, people commute from all over Israel to attend the school.

He is a rarity in his own land, one of only a handful of refuseniks living in Israel. Each year roughly 30,000 18-year-olds are drafted into the IDF, although 35% of such draftees manage to avoid military service for religious reasons. A far tinier percentage publicly refuses to fight for moral and political reasons to protest their country's occupation of Palestinian lands. The exact numbers are hard to find. I've asked war resister groups in Israel, but no one seems to have any. Hilel's estimate: between 5 and 15 refuseniks a year.

"I've thought the occupation of Palestine was immoral at least since I was in eighth grade," he told me. "But it was the March of Return that played a large role in sustaining the courage to say no to military service."

The Great March of Return began in the besieged Gaza Strip on March 30, 2018, the 42nd anniversary of the day in 1976 that Israeli police shot and killed six Palestinian citizens of Israel as they protested the government's expropriation of land. During the six-month protest movement that followed in 2018, Israeli soldiers killed another 141 demonstrators, while nearly 10,000 were injured, including 919 children, all shot.

"I couldn't be a part of that," he said. "I'd rather be in jail."

However, after 37 days in prison, it was the letter Hilel received from Abu Artema, a key Palestinian organiser of that march, which

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provided him with his greatest inspiration. It read in part:

"Your decision is what will help end this dark period inflicted on Palestinians, and at the same time mitigate the fears of younger Israeli generations who were born into a complicated situation and a turbulent geographical area deprived of security and peace. . . . I believe the solution is near and possible. It will not require more than the courage to take initiative and set a new perspective, after traditional solutions have failed to achieve a just settlement. Let us fight together for human rights, for a country that is democratic for all its citizens, and for Israelis and Palestinians to live together based on citizenship and equality, not segregation and racism."

"This letter excited me a great deal," Hilel said. "It's Palestinians like Artema who have the true courage, the kind that can only come from the moral authority of those resisting occupation and violent oppression. This type of authority is much stronger than the forces that occupy Palestine."

After trying yet again to reach him by phone, I send Hilel a Facebook message:

"I hope everything is all right. Call me when you can. By the way, I was listening to this song and it reminded me of you. Stay strong, brother."

I attach a *YouTube* video of "The World's Greatest" by Bonnie "Prince" Billy:

*I'm that little bit of hope
With my back against the ropes.
I can feel it
I'm the world's greatest . . .*

War Resister to War Resister

As a war resister myself while

serving in the US Army—I was protesting America's unending wars across the Greater Middle East—I've wondered a lot about what it means to be one in Israel, a country where an antiwar movement is almost non-existent. My friends in the US who are familiar with the militarisation of Israel and the population's overwhelming support for their country's still-expanding occupation respect what Hilel is doing, but wonder about the political purpose of an essay like this one about a war resister who lives in a country where such creatures are rarer than a snowy day in Jerusalem.

A valid point: the Israeli antiwar movement (if you can even call it a movement at this moment) is a long, long way from making a dent in the occupation, no less ending it, and I wouldn't want to convey false hope about what such refuseniks mean to the larger question of Palestinian liberation.

Still, I talk to Hilel because I know how much it would have meant to me if someone had contacted me when I was still resisting the Global War on Terror within the 2nd Ranger Battalion nearly 15 years ago. If I had known that there were others like me or at least others ready to support me, it would have made my own sense of isolation during the six months I spent on lockdown inside my barracks less intolerable.

There's more, though. Each time Hilel and I speak, I feel like I'm the one being energised by the conversation. He's smart, reads a lot of the books I also read (despite the 22-year age difference between us), and has a passion for rock climbing in the Shagor mountain range. More than anything else, though, he has a kind of energy that I identify only with those who are standing up for a

principle, whatever the repercussions for their own future. He exhibits no misgivings about what he's doing, but somehow remains remarkably grounded in reality.

"It's hard being rejected by friends and family who have never questioned the occupation," he tells me in one of our phone conversations. (His English, by the way, is superb.) "Very few in my class agree with what I'm doing. But I believe in what I'm doing. That is the most important thing. Although, who knows, my decision to resist may have a positive ripple effect in a way we can't appreciate at this point in time."

He tells me all this in a tone that feels both light and confident, the very opposite of what you might imagine from a teenager who had at that moment been jailed six times in a single year and expected more of the same. His voice is authentic. It's all his and draws strength from a self-possessed sense of the truth.

Like many, I've been exhausted and depressed by Donald Trump's presidency. His administration represents a dark step back when it comes to social justice issues around the world and makes me question the time I still spend organising against America's endless wars. The ship appears to be sinking, no matter what I do, and since the election I've found myself asking why I shouldn't try to just shut out the world.

In such a context, talking with Hilel has been a tonic for me. After our conversations, the all-too-familiar feelings of depression and hopelessness fade, at least briefly, while his courage and optimism energise me. So part of my urge in writing this piece is to convey that very feeling, hoping others will be

energised, too. It's a tall order these days, but worth a try.

The Adventures of a Teenage Refusenik

After a week in which my calls frustratingly keep going to voicemail, I finally hear back. "They arrested me again," he informs me. "I expected it, but wasn't sure they would come back a seventh time." Surprisingly, he's still in good spirits.

The Israeli government distinguishes between pacifists who reject the use of force for any reason and those with "selective conscience," or those who specifically refuse to fight in protest over the occupation of Palestinian territory. The latter are treated far more severely and are significantly more likely to find themselves in prison.

Hilel's public declaration—which has been circulating in left-leaning outlets in Israel—on why he continues to refuse military service couldn't be clearer on where he stands and helps explain why the Israeli government has sent him back to prison so regularly:

"I cannot enlist, because from a *very young age I was educated to believe that all humans are equal. I do not believe in some common denominator which all Jews share and which sets them apart from Arabs. I do not believe that I should be treated differently from a child born in Gaza or in Jenin, and I do not believe that the sorrows or the happiness of any of us are more important than those of anyone else. . . . As a person who was born into the more powerful side of the hierarchy between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River, I was given the power as well as the obligation to try to*

fight that hierarchy."

Refuseniks like Hilel generally spend 20 days in jail. They are then released for a day or two and immediately reprocessed back into prison.

"There is a lot of sitting around in prison. I read a lot. It's a military prison so I'm in with people who are in trouble for a variety of things while serving in the IDF." There are different cellblocks (A, B, and C) designated for various infractions—A being the "easiest," C the "hardest," according to Hilel: "I started in A, but worked my way up to C because I continue to refuse to fight. C is where those who commit assaults of varying degree within the IDF are housed. C is used as a threat by the jailors. I was in C for a short time because I wouldn't tell a group of demonstrators protesting my arrest to disperse. After they left on their own, they sent me back to B."

I ask him how many protestors there were. "About 50," he replies, "But they gave me a lot of strength. Atlit, where the jail is, is not a very big town, so to have anyone out there at all was encouraging."

An increasing number of Israelis oppose the occupation and some have formed groups to help support war resisters. Yesh Gvul, an organisation that backs refuseniks like Hilel (and to which he belongs), for instance, first put me in touch with him. Palestinians like Abu Artema are also reaching out to refuseniks. Palestinian and Israeli activists are working to overcome the barriers that divide them, searching for creative ways to connect and organise against the occupation. In December 2018, Israeli activists, including conscientious objectors, held a video meeting with Artema. "Those who refuse to take part in

the attacks on the demonstrators in Gaza, who express their natural right to protest against the siege, those who refuse to take part in the attacks on Gaza's citizens—they stand on the right side of history," Artema said during the call.

And now, having grown strangely attached to Hilel, I feel a small flood of relief that he's on the phone with me once again. I ask if we can Skype so that I can actually see him and he promptly agrees. It's December and he's wearing a ski hat. He's sitting in his parent's kitchen and his eyes glimmer. As he talks, I'm taken back to my own 19-year-old self, to the Rory Fanning who was still trying to fit in, get decent grades, and have fun. I certainly wasn't taking on my government, which only makes me more impressed that he is.

He and I chat more about his family and his town. Yodfat was once a place governed by a group of people called the Kibbutz (from the Hebrew word *kvutza*, meaning "group"). Inspired in part by Karl Marx, the Kibbutz movement strove to live communally and maintain deep connections to agriculture. "It's still a progressive town," he says, "and most people, at least as lip service, will say they oppose the occupation. However, they see obedience to the current law and general support for the military—even though some of them may admit it's an undemocratic one—as far more important."

I ask him about the Boycott Divestment Sanction, or BDS, movement. BDS is Palestinian-led and inspired by the South African anti-apartheid movement. It calls on others globally to pressure Israel to comply with international law and end the occupation of Palestine.

"The people of Israel feel

isolated from the rest of the world,” Hilel responds. “The government and media constantly remind them how Iran and so many others want to destroy the country. The effects of anti-Semitism echo in everyone’s head. I think BDS only reinforces the idea that the government promotes that Jews are rejected by the world.”

I remind him how an earlier BDS-style movement helped end apartheid in South Africa and ask if he thinks it might be an effective way to end Israel’s system of apartheid, too. “Maybe,” he responds hesitantly. “I haven’t thought about it too much. I could certainly see how it could.” I don’t press the issue, but as ever I’m struck by how open he is, even on a topic that the Israeli government clearly feels deeply threatened by.

As I can see via Skype, the sun is going down behind Hilel. It’s still morning here in Chicago, but six in the evening in Yodfat, so I let him go back to his embattled teenage life.

And I wonder yet again how I’ll write about that life, his dilemmas, and the unnerving world both of us find ourselves in. Then, I’m reminded of how encouraging it felt to have many active-duty soldiers reach out to me over the years after hearing my own story of war resistance. I know that there are surprising numbers of people in the US military who question America’s endless wars, trillion-dollar national security budgets, and the near-robotic thank-you-for-your-service patriotism of so many in this country, because I’ve met or talked to many of them and even seen a few over the years break ranks as I did (and as, in a very different situation, Hilel has done). And obviously there must be many others out there I know nothing about.

News travels fast these days.

Support networks like Veterans for Peace and About Face continue to be built up in this country to support soldiers who question their mission. And I know that, in Israel, there are others who think the way Hilel does and are just waiting for an atmosphere of greater support to develop so that they, too, can begin to resist the injustices of their moment and their country. That, of course, is what Hilel has helped accomplish. Stories like his create openings for others to act. Sooner or later, those others, inspired by him and perhaps by similar figures to come, will inevitably follow their lead.

Just as I’m finishing this piece, he suddenly calls to tell me that he’s been released—for good! The Israeli Defense Forces have freed him from his military obligation. At first, a ruling against releasing him came down from a committee of civilians and officers controlled by the IDF, because his refusal to fight stemmed from reasons that were “political” rather than from “conscience.” Later that day, however, a higher-ranking officer overturned that group’s decision and, after his seventh imprisonment, Hilel was suddenly free.

He isn’t sure why the decision was overturned, but perhaps the higher-ups finally concluded that he simply wouldn’t break under their pressure. Quite the opposite, a determined 19-year-old resister might only get more attention if they kept sending him back to jail. His courage might, in fact, motivate others to resist, the last thing the IDF wants right now.

I look forward to staying in touch with Hilel. He tells me he plans on working with disadvantaged youth in Israel for the next two years.

I know there are great things in store for him. Interacting with a fellow war-resister across continents and seas these last few months, and seeing him go from prison to freedom in a matter of weeks, has reinvigorated my own tired spirit in ways I had not anticipated when I sent my first note to him.

(Rory Fanning is a US-based journalist and writer.)

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The War on Venezuela Is Built on Lies

John Pilger

Travelling with Hugo Chavez, I soon understood the threat of Venezuela. At a farming co-operative in Lara state, people waited patiently and with good humour in the heat. Jugs of water and melon juice were passed around. A guitar was played; a woman, Katarina, stood and sang with a husky contralto.

"What did her words say?" I asked.

"That we are proud," was the reply.

The applause for her merged with the arrival of Chavez. Under one arm he carried a satchel bursting with books. He wore his big red shirt and greeted people by name, stopping to listen. What struck me was his capacity to listen.

But now he read. For almost two hours he read into the microphone from the stack of books beside him: Orwell, Dickens, Tolstoy, Zola, Hemingway, Chomsky, Neruda: a page here, a line or two there. People clapped and whistled as he moved from author to author.

Then farmers took the microphone and told him what they knew, and what they needed; one ancient face, carved it seemed from a nearby banyan, made a long, critical speech on the subject of irrigation; Chavez took notes.

Wine is grown here, a dark Syrah type grape. "John, John, come up here," said El Presidente, having watched me fall asleep in the heat and the depths of *Oliver Twist*.

"He likes red wine," Chavez told the cheering, whistling audience, and presented me with a bottle of "vino de la gente." My few words

in bad Spanish brought whistles and laughter.

Watching Chavez with *la gente* made sense of a man who promised, on coming to power, that his every move would be subject to the will of the people. In eight years, Chavez won eight elections and referendums: a world record. He was electorally the most popular head of state in the Western Hemisphere, probably in the world.

Every major chavista reform was voted on, notably a new constitution of which 71 percent of the people approved each of the 396 articles that enshrined unheard of freedoms, such as Article 123, which for the first time recognised the human rights of mixed-race and black people, of whom Chavez was one.

One of his tutorials on the road quoted a feminist writer: "Love and solidarity are the same." His audiences understood this well and expressed themselves with dignity, seldom with deference. Ordinary people regarded Chavez and his government as their first champions: as theirs.

This was especially true of the indigenous, mestizos and Afro-Venezuelans, who had been held in historic contempt by Chavez's immediate predecessors and by those who today live far from the *barrios*, in the mansions and penthouses of East Caracas, who commute to Miami where their banks are and who regard themselves as "white". They are the powerful core of what the media calls "the opposition".

When I met this class, in suburbs called Country Club, in homes

appointed with low chandeliers and bad portraits, I recognised them. They could be white South Africans, the petite bourgeoisie of Constantia and Sandton, pillars of the cruelties of apartheid.

Cartoonists in the Venezuelan press, most of which are owned by an oligarchy and oppose the government, portrayed Chavez as an ape. A radio host referred to "the monkey". In the private universities, the verbal currency of the children of the well-off is often racist abuse of those whose shackles are just visible through the pollution.

Although identity politics are all the rage in the pages of liberal newspapers in the West, race and class are two words almost never uttered in the mendacious "coverage" of Washington's latest, most naked attempt to grab the world's greatest source of oil and reclaim its "backyard".

For all the chavistas' faults—such as allowing the Venezuelan economy to become hostage to the fortunes of oil and never seriously challenging big capital and corruption—they brought social justice and pride to millions of people and they did it with unprecedented democracy.

"Of the 92 elections that we've monitored," said former President Jimmy Carter, whose Carter Centre is a respected monitor of elections around the world, "I would say the election process in Venezuela is the best in the world." By way of contrast, said Carter, the US election system, with its emphasis on campaign money, "is one of the worst".

In extending the franchise to a parallel people's state of communal authority, based in the poorest barrios, Chavez described Venezuelan democracy as "our version of Rousseau's idea of popular sovereignty".

In Barrio La Linea, seated in her tiny kitchen, Beatrice Balazo told me her children were the first generation of the poor to attend a full day's school and be given a hot meal and to learn music, art and dance. "I have seen their confidence blossom like flowers," she said.

In Barrio La Vega, I listened to a nurse, Mariella Machado, a black woman of 45 with a wicked laugh, address an urban land council on subjects ranging from homelessness to illegal war. That day, they were launching Mision Madres de Barrio, a programme aimed at poverty among single mothers. Under the constitution, women have the right to be paid as carers, and can borrow from a special women's bank. Now the poorest housewives get the equivalent of \$200 a month.

In a room lit by a single fluorescent tube, I met Ana Lucia Fernandez, aged 86, and Mavis Mendez, aged 95. A mere 33-year-old, Sonia Alvarez, had come with her two children. Once, none of them could read and write; now they were studying mathematics. For the first time in its history, Venezuela has almost 100 per cent literacy.

This is the work of Mission Robinson, which was designed for adults and teenagers previously denied an education because of poverty. Mission Ribas gives everyone the opportunity of a secondary education, called a *bachillerato*. (The names Robinson and Ribas refer to Venezuelan independence leaders from the 19th century).

In her 95 years, Mavis Mendez had seen a parade of governments, mostly vassals of Washington, preside over the theft of billions of dollars in oil spoils, much of it flown to Miami. "We didn't matter in a human sense," she told me. "We lived and died without real education and running water, and food we couldn't afford. When we fell ill, the weakest died. Now I can read and write my name and so much more; and whatever the rich and the media say, we have planted the seeds of true democracy and I have the joy of seeing it happen."

In 2002, during a Washington-backed coup, Mavis's sons and daughters and grandchildren and great-grandchildren joined hundreds of thousands who swept down from the barrios on the hillsides and demanded the army remained loyal to Chavez.

"The people rescued me," Chavez told me. "They did it with the media against me, preventing even the basic facts of what happened. For popular democracy in heroic action, I suggest you look no further."

Since Chavez's death in 2013, his successor Nicolas Maduro has shed his derisory label in the Western press as a "former bus driver" and become Saddam Hussein incarnate. His media abuse is ridiculous. On his watch, the slide in the price of oil has caused hyper inflation and played havoc with prices in a society that imports almost all its food; yet, as the journalist and film-maker Pablo Navarrete reported this week, Venezuela is not the catastrophe it has been painted. "There is food everywhere," he wrote. "I have filmed lots of videos of food in markets all over Caracas . . . it's Friday night and the restaurants are full."

In 2018, Maduro was re-elected

President. A section of the opposition boycotted the election, a tactic tried against Chavez. The boycott failed: 9,389,056 people voted; sixteen parties participated and six candidates stood for the presidency. Maduro won 6,248,864 votes, or 67.84 per cent.

On election day, I spoke to one of the 150 foreign election observers. "It was entirely fair," he said. "There was no fraud; none of the lurid media claims stood up. Zero. Amazing really."

Like a page from Alice's tea party, the Trump administration has presented Juan Guaido, a pop-up creation of the CIA-front National Endowment for Democracy, as the "legitimate President of Venezuela". Unheard of by 81 per cent of the Venezuelan people, according to The Nation, Guaido has been elected by no one.

Maduro is "illegitimate", says Trump (who won the US presidency with three million fewer votes than his opponent), a "dictator", says demonstrably unhinged vice president Mike Pence and an oil trophy-in-waiting, says "national security" adviser John Bolton (who when I interviewed him in 2003 said, "Hey, are you a communist, maybe even Labour?").

As his "special envoy to Venezuela" (coup master), Trump has appointed a convicted felon, Elliot Abrams, whose intrigues in the service of Presidents Reagan and George W. Bush helped produce the Iran-Contra scandal in the 1980s and plunge central America into years of blood-soaked misery.

Putting Lewis Carroll aside, these "crazies" belong in newsreels from the 1930s. And yet their lies about Venezuela have been taken up with enthusiasm by those paid to keep the record straight.

On *Channel 4 News*, Jon Snow bellowed at the Labour MP Chris Williamson, "Look, you and Mr. Corbyn are in a very nasty corner [on Venezuela]!" When Williamson tried to explain why threatening a sovereign country was wrong, Snow cut him off. "You've had a good go!"

In 2006, *Channel 4 News* effectively accused Chavez of plotting to make nuclear weapons with Iran: a fantasy. The then Washington correspondent, Jonathan Rugman, allowed a war criminal, Donald Rumsfeld, to liken Chavez to Hitler, unchallenged.

Researchers at the University of the West of England studied the BBC's reporting of Venezuela over a ten-year period. They looked at 304 reports and found that only three of these referred to any of the positive policies of the government. For the BBC, Venezuela's democratic record, human rights legislation, food programmes, healthcare initiatives and poverty reduction did not happen. The greatest literacy programme in human history did not happen, just as the millions who march in support of Maduro and in memory of Chavez, do not exist.

When asked why she filmed only an opposition march, the BBC reporter Orla Guerin tweeted that it was "too difficult" to be on two marches in one day.

A war has been declared on Venezuela, of which the truth is "too difficult" to report.

It is too difficult to report the collapse of oil prices since 2014 as largely the result of criminal machinations by Wall Street. It is too difficult to report the blocking of Venezuela's access to the US-dominated international financial system as sabotage. It is too difficult to report Washington's "sanctions"

against Venezuela, which have caused the loss of at least \$6 billion in Venezuela's revenue since 2017, including \$2 billion worth of imported medicines, as illegal, or the Bank of England's refusal to return Venezuela's gold reserves as an act of piracy.

The former United Nations Rapporteur, Alfred de Zayas, has likened this to a "medieval siege" designed "to bring countries to their knees". It is a criminal assault, he says. It is similar to that faced by Salvador Allende in 1970 when President Richard Nixon and his equivalent of John Bolton, Henry Kissinger, set out to "make the economy [of Chile] scream". The long dark night of Pinochet followed.

The *Guardian* correspondent, Tom Phillips, has tweeted a picture of a cap on which the words in Spanish mean in local slang: "Make Venezuela fucking cool again." The reporter as clown may be the final stage of much of mainstream journalism's degeneration.

Should the CIA stooge Guaido and his white supremacists grab power, it will be the 68th overthrow of a sovereign government by the United States, most of them democracies. A fire sale of Venezuela's utilities and mineral wealth will surely follow, along with the theft of the country's oil, as outlined by John Bolton.

Under the last Washington-controlled government in Caracas, poverty reached historic proportions. There was no healthcare for those could not pay. There was no universal education; Mavis Mendez, and millions like her, could not read or write. How cool is that, Tom?

(John Pilger is a renowned investigative journalist and documentary film-maker.)

The End and the Beginning

Wisława Szymborska

(translated by Johanna Trzeciak):

After every war
someone has to clean up.
Things won't
straighten themselves up, after all.

Someone has to push the rubble
to the side of the road,
so the corpse-filled wagons
can pass.

Someone has to get mired
in scum and ashes,
sofa springs,
splintered glass,
and bloody rags.

Someone has to drag in a girder
to prop up a wall.
Someone has to glaze a window,
rehang a door.

Photogenic it's not,
and takes years.
All the cameras have left
for another war.

We'll need the bridges back,
and new railway stations.
Sleeves will go ragged
from rolling them up.

Someone, broom in hand,
still recalls the way it was.
Someone else listens
and nods with unsevered head.
But already there are those nearby
starting to mill about
who will find it dull.

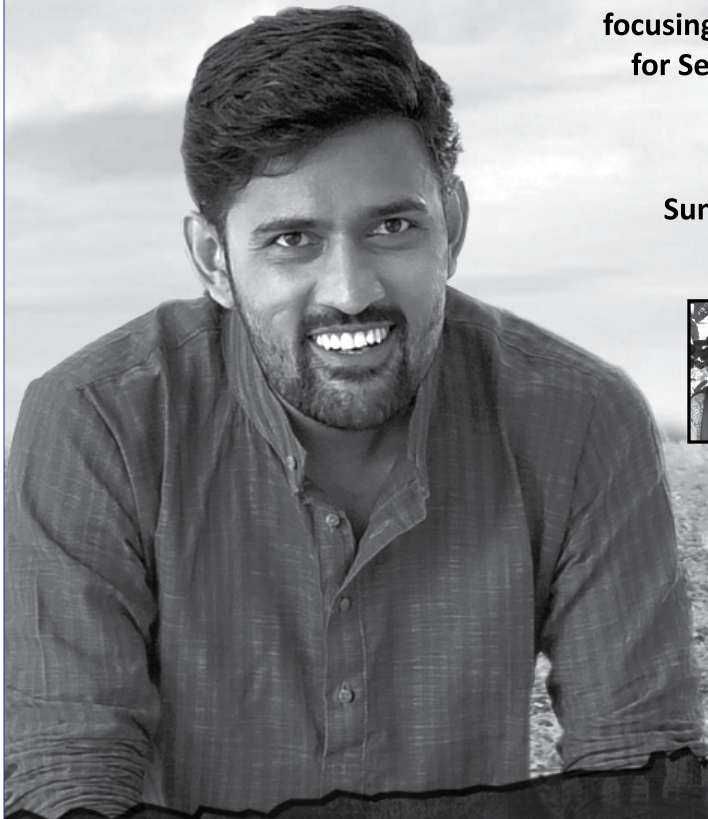
From out of the bushes
sometimes someone still unearths
rusted-out arguments
and carries them to the garbage pile.

Those who knew
what was going on here
must make way for
those who know little.
And less than little.
And finally as little as nothing.

In the grass that has overgrown
causes and effects,
someone must be stretched out
blade of grass in his mouth
gazing at the clouds.



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International Women's Day

March 8—International Women's Day—is a day of international solidarity, and a day for reviewing the strength and organisation of working women.

But this is not a special day for women alone. March 8 is a historic and memorable day for the working people of the whole world. In 1917, on this day (February 23 according to the Russian calendar—Russia used a different calendar then) the great February revolution broke out in Russia. It began with the working women of Petersburg deciding to raise the banner of opposition to the tsar and his associates. The women were angry with deteriorating living conditions, especially extreme rises in food costs. They took to the streets to protest—which turned into a multi-day food riot. Working class men too joined them. On February 25, the Czar ordered his soldiers to crush the uprising, by shooting the women protestors if necessary. But the repression backfired, and ignited even more powerful protests. A few days later the Czar was forced to abdicate and thus began the Russian Revolution. No wonder women's militant activist is so feared in our society. It has—literally—brought down a Czar and sparked a revolution!

But if this is a day to remember for all working people, why do we call it "Women's Day"? To answer this question, we have to go into the history of how Women's Day came about.

History of International Women's Day (IWD)

IWD was born at the turn of the 20th century, in a time of great social turbulence and huge struggles by people for a better life. Working women were participating in these struggles in huge numbers and raising issues related to women's equality. One of their key demands was the right to vote. In the years before the First World War, women had yet to win the right to vote in several capitalist countries. Yet, at the same time, the harsh reality of capitalism demanded the participation of women in the country's economy. Every year there was an increase in the number of women who had to work in the factories and workshops farms, or as servants and cleaners. Women worked alongside men and the wealth of the country was created by their hands. But women remained without the vote.

The seeds of IWD were planted in 1908, when 30,000 striking

garment workers, mainly migrant women, marched through New York City demanding shorter working hours, better pay and the right to vote. The strike lasted three months and the workers won most of their demands.

A year later, in 1909, the Socialist Party of America held the first National Woman's Day in New York City, on February 28, a Sunday, so that working women could participate. Thousands showed up to various events uniting the suffragist and socialist causes.

In August 1910, women from 17 countries met at the Second International Conference of Socialist Working Women in Copenhagen. Leading German socialist-feminists Luise Zietz and Clara Zetkin suggested holding an International Woman's Day the following year to mark the garment workers' victory in America and provide a focus for the growing international campaign for women's right to vote. The conference of more than 100 women representing unions, socialist parties, working women's clubs, and the first three women elected to the Finnish parliament, gave the suggestion unanimous approval. The Women's Day resolution read:

Socialist women of all nationalities have to organise a special Women's Day (*Frauentag*), which must, above all, promote the propaganda of female suffrage. This demand must be discussed in connection with the whole woman's question, according to the socialist conception.

For the delegates, supporting the "socialist conception" meant promoting not just female suffrage, but labour legislation for working

women, social assistance for mothers and children, equal treatment of single mothers, provision of nurseries and kindergartens, distribution of free meals and free educational facilities in schools, and international solidarity.

The first International Women's Day

The decision taken at the Second International Congress of Socialist Women was not left on paper. It was decided to hold the first International Women's Day on March 19, 1911.

This date was not chosen at random. The date was chosen to commemorate the 1848 Revolution in Berlin. On March 19, 1848, the Prussian king had recognised for the first time the strength of the working people. Among the many promises he made, which he later failed to keep, was the introduction of votes for women.

The first IWD celebrations were organised in Germany, Austria and Denmark on March 19, 1911. The biggest celebrations took place in Germany. For two months before March 19, women activists made known the plans for a demonstration both by word of mouth and in the press. In Germany, two and a half million copies of a flyer urging participation in Women's Day were printed and distributed. The success of the first IWD exceeded all expectations. Trumpeting the battle cry "Forward to female suffrage," more than a million women—mostly, but not exclusively, women organised in the German Social Democratic Party and the unions—took to the streets in Germany demanding social and political equality. They organised "popular

public political assemblies"—forty-two in Berlin alone—where they discussed the issues affecting their lives. While the women attended the meetings, their men stayed at home with their children for a change.

In 1913, International Women's Day was transferred to the 8th of March. Since then, this day has remained a day to remember the militant struggles of working women all over the globe. It is a day to honour the struggle of women who fought to form unions, organise the working people, protest racism and fascism, defend the Earth from utter destruction, struggle to build a more humane society that is oriented not towards the profit maximisation for a few but whose basic logic is the well-being of the common people. It is a day to remember the women who revolutionised society by challenging the institution of marriage, defying the men in their lives (husbands, bosses, fathers), fighting for abortion rights, standing up to sexist violence, and daring to define their own sexuality and control their own lives.

International Women's Day in India

In India, International Women's Day is a day to honour the women who fought to break their patriarchal chains, and stand up for their rights as human beings. It is because of their struggles that there has been a sea change in the situation of women in the country. A hundred and fifty years ago, education for girls was prohibited, they were married off very young by their parents; women did not have the right to step out of their houses and take a job. Today, girls nearly equal boys in total

enrolment in colleges. Numerous women are confidently pursuing various different career paths in society. Militant struggles of women have led to enactment of several new laws to protect women from molestation and discrimination: a special law has been enacted prohibiting dowry, and a stringent law has been enacted to prosecute the husband's family in case of dowry deaths; the laws to protect women from molestation and rape have been made more stringent; a path-breaking law has been enacted that recognises domestic violence, including both physical and mental violence, as a crime; a special law has been enacted to protect women from sexual harassment at their workplace; and so on.

International Women's Day is a day of militant struggle against sexism in all forms, against racism—casteism—communalism, against the socio-economic system that profits directly from our oppression and exploitation, and against the threat of fascism and corporatism looming over Indian society.

The perfect way to celebrate IWD and honour the women who struggled before us, the women who struggle with us, and our daughters who will struggle after us, would be: Let us commit ourselves to fight for a society that would truly be oriented towards fulfilling the basic needs of all human beings—healthy food, invigorating education, best possible health care, decent shelter, security in old age,

clean pollution-free environment — and would unleash the full development of all human potential.

Happy IWD

—Editors

Patriotism of Cowardice and Enslaved Mind

Prem Singh

I

The modern industrial civilisation has witnessed two World Wars. The researchers of war have yet not been able to estimate the magnitude of casualties/deaths—both military and civilian—which occurred in these two World Wars. The estimated figure of people killed in both World Wars is between 10 to 15 crores. World Wars I and II were preceded and succeeded by many major battles. Wars of independence were invariably fought by all the colonised countries. Even the Cold War that began after the end of the World War II and lasted until the dissolution of the USSR, has been described by the scholars as a special kind of world war. Cold War was also characterised by a large number of deaths. There have been many direct and proxy wars during and after the Cold War involving sometimes two countries and sometimes five-six countries. In many wars of the nature of internal conflicts such as those that followed the dissolution of Yugoslavia, civil war was accompanied by racial massacre. In the last few decades, Islamic terrorists have redefined the concept of war which now includes the features of traditional war, counter-war and civil war. In response a new concept of 'War Against Terror' (WAT), has emerged which is global in nature.

India also played a role in these ongoing wars. Being a British colony, India participated in the two World Wars, even though the participation was limited in nature. In 1942, India fought a direct war

against the colonial power. In 1942, according to Dr. Lohia, 50 thousand patriots were killed by the British. In the middle of World War II, under the leadership of Subhash Chandra Bose and in collaboration with the Axis countries, the Azad Hind Fauj (INA) fought the freedom struggle of India in its own way. After independence, in 1948, 1962, 1965, 1971 and 1999 India fought wars with its two neighbours—Pakistan and China.

So long as imperialists continue their loot, wars will also keep on occurring. The looters will continue to wage wars against the countries that are looted. Simultaneously, the imperialist forces will keep forcing these countries to wage wars against each other and will also fight amongst themselves for the dominance of various resources. Further, the brokers serving the interests of the imperialist powers in the countries looted by the imperialists will keep waging war against the working classes of their own countries. Therefore, wars are inevitable so long as this exploitative capitalist system exists.

Forgetting the danger posed by war, a section of the Indian civil society on the one hand dreams of India becoming a superpower, and on the other hand, works itself into a frenzy over patriotism and exhortations about war. In this context, the situation has now become catastrophic—it attacks in groups, sometimes even alone, 'the hidden traitors in the house'. It has become common practice that such elements of civil society openly

abuse even women in the name of patriotism.

Clearly, the civil society of India does not know its country. Nor does it feel any sincere attachment to it. It cannot even think of making any sacrifice for the country. In spite of this, it is afflicted with patriotism and war hysteria, and poses as if it is the sole master of the whole country. While these groups term themselves as civil society of India, their members would be termed as illegitimate citizens of India if they are tested on the touchstone of the Indian Freedom Struggle and the Indian Constitution. In the words of Kishan Patnayak, an enslaved mentality has irreparably dented their minds. Over the past few decades, this pathology shows no sign of abatement, rather it has been growing in intensity with the passage of time.

II

With the making of 'new India' with the New Economic Policies, patriotism has possessed the civil society like a ghost. Simultaneously, its already narrow sense of citizenship has become narrower, and the virtues of humanity have eroded. The fact is known to everyone that the resources and labour of the country have been robbed by corporate capitalism during the last three decades. Under the rule of Narendra Modi, this process has become transformed into naked plunder. The private sector is being promoted at the expense of the public sector against the spirit of the Constitution. All democratic institutions are being destroyed. Democracy is changing into a mobocracy. India is stuck badly in the clutches of neo-imperialism. These deeds of the political leadership, which have resulted in

the loss of freedom, the Constitution, the resources, the labour and the constitutional institutions could not have been done without the collusion of the civil society. But the civil society is not ready to accept the blame of becoming a traitor and slave of the imperialist forces. For obvious reasons, as the same civil society has unjustly enriched itself—socially as well as economically—over the last three decades. As the treacherous conduct and slavery of the civil society of India increases, its pompous display of patriotism will also take new forms. The corporate capitalism will readily and fully sponsor such performances, so that the vast population devastated by this robbery continues to be intoxicated by the drug of patriotism. The civil society will continue to tell this deprived and excluded population that the cause of their problems is not the loot of corporate capitalism, but the Muslims. However, the impact of this jingoistic atmosphere is such that even Muslims do not want to be behind anyone in the race of showing patriotism!

The ideals of patriotism projected by the civil society keep changing from time to time. But in all this, there is one constant—the faith of civil society in capitalism. For the past few years, its ideal is Narendra Modi and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Take the RSS first. Ever since its establishment, the RSS has always claimed to be patriotic. It is said that God's bounty is boundless. Today's God is corporate capitalism. With its grace, RSS is distributing certificates of patriotism today! It claims that its army of his volunteers is willing to defend our borders even before the Indian army! That the bunkers made from cow dung will repel

China's invasion of Doklam! Nation-protecting yagnas will safeguard the nation! Soldiers should be made to read Gita–Ramayana to enhance their bravery! Through some of his leaders, it even says that soldiers are meant to die in the security of the country. And also that by the atmosphere created by the deaths of soldiers, how many seats will be won by BJP in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections! Its workers are caught while spying for the Pakistani intelligence agency ISI, but that does not affect the patriotism of the RSS! Because in its eyes they are 'holy sinners'!

Narendra Modi, whose government allowed 100 percent Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the defense sector soon after he became the Prime Minister, explains that the traders take more risk than soldiers for the country! He also says that business runs in his veins! 'Patriotic' businessmen are seen running with him in the country and abroad! Probably in one such run, Narendra Modi one day went to meet Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif without any official program! In the Rafale aircraft deal, the name of the public sector company Hindustan Aeronautical Limited (HAL) was removed and replaced by the newly formed company of industrialist Anil Ambani! He openly and proudly declares his friendship with his industrial friends; the interests of businessmen are paramount for him, provided they are big businessmen!

Such a Narendra Modi is the ideal of patriotism of the civil society of India; it worships him unquestioningly. So, Narendra Modi too considers himself to be above the questions and is confident that his worshippers are capable of taking care of all the tasks. Even after the

terrorist attack on security forces in Pulwama on February 14, he was busy in shooting for a film being made on him, inaugurating events and giving speeches to the election rallies, leaving his worshippers to handle everything.

A little discussion about the Pulwama attack must be made here. The first task after the terrorist attack should have been to launch a serious investigation into it, which would have resulted in the discovery of some clues about it. But nothing like this happened in India; even the number of soldiers who were martyred in the attack is not clear to the people – some reports claim 42 died, others 44 or 40. If the Pulwama attack happened due to same lapses on behalf of the government, as admitted by the Governor himself immediately after the attack, then it should have been honestly investigated, accountability fixed, and culprits punished as per the law. But sadly, the cacophony war cries drowned February 14. The death of these para-military soldiers has no value, because they were not members of the civil society fattened by the loot of corporate capitalism. Yes, it was possible to use them for doing politics; and that has been done.

In a democracy, the military establishment works under the political leadership. But at the same time it is also necessary that political leadership does not work under the pressure of imperialist powers at least in the matter of security of the country. The Indian Air Force (IAF) entered into Pakistan in pre-dawn hours on February 26 and dropped bombs at the training camp of the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM) situated in Balakot. Before the attack occurred, the President of America had given a statement

that India would do something big to avenge the Pulwama attack. In retaliation to the IAF action, the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) entered Indian territory and attacked a military base. IAF aircraft scrambled to intercept them, but in the ensuing dogfight, an Indian MiG-21 fighter aircraft got shot down. The pilot Abhinandan Varthaman ejected, and landed in Pakistan's territory. The US President again said that a good news will come from Pakistan. Soon after, the Indian pilot was released by Pakistan.

During the tenures of all the Prime Ministers of India after Indira Gandhi, the fate of India has rested with America. On October 1, 2001, JEM attacked the State assembly building in Srinagar, in which 27 people were killed and 60 were injured. The then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee wrote a letter to the then US President George Bush pleading with him to persuade Pakistan to stop training terrorists on its soil. By then, 9/11 had happened and Vajpayee had been first after Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair to join America's 'new war' against terrorism. But despite that, America stood with Pakistan then, and supports it even today. That America can dictate to Pakistan is understandable, but how can it give directions to India?

The civil society has been continuously clamouring for war ever since the Pulwama attack of February 14. There has been no war, neither was it ever going to take place. Meanwhile, more than 50 Indian soldiers have been martyred in a fortnight. We still do not know with certainty if we killed more terrorists than this number in the air strike across the border by the IAF. The bombs dropped in

Balakot by the IAF were purchased from Israel. The war-mongers, in their enthusiasm for war, have not cared to ask why is it that we have suddenly started buying arms from Israel, instead of from Russia as earlier? Will India's security forever be predicated on weapons purchased from abroad? Will the security of India be left in the hands of private companies established by crony capitalists guided by the lust of profit at the expense of the Public Sector? Will America, the 'Mecca' of civil society, which has been worshiping it for the last 40 years, stop giving arms and other financial assistance to Pakistan? And, will India become a superpower on the strength of the purchased weapons?

III

Considering RSS and Modi as their ideal for patriotism is not limited to the RSS/BJP camp followers only. There are a great number of ordinary people who, though they are not associated with the RSS, are also influenced by its 'nationalist' propaganda. And then, there are the highly educated professionals and government officers who, despite all their capabilities, are essentially political illiterates. All these people provide a great deal of strength to the RSS/BJP brand of patriotism.

The secular progressive camp of the civil society is against the RSS/BJP brand of patriotism. But it has been relegated to the margins. They are not able to do anything other than repeating some of the known cliches and facts against the RSS/BJP or make fun about the 'devotees' of Modi on social media. There are several reasons for its weakness. The most important reason is that by being a covert supporter of corporate capitalism, it automatically

stands with the RSS/BJP. Apart from this, its strategy of waging a sustained 'war' against the RSS also strengthens the RSS/BJP. Its opportunistic behavior with non-BJP political parties and leaders hinders the efforts of the progressive stream to create a decisive alternative to corporate capitalism and thus brings lasting benefits to the RSS/BJP. Most of the intellectuals and activists of this camp who fight for social justice and equality increase the political power of the RSS/BJP by abusing Hinduism and its Gods/Goddesses. There are also individuals and groups in the secular–progressive camp who are always full of anger against

the Indian State. In their anger, they forget to make a distinction between the governments formed in the Indian State and the State itself. Their anger often leads them to opposition of the Indian State itself. This only goes to the benefit of the RSS/BJP. In recent times, an 'ideologically neutral' group has also emerged that has actually been born from the womb of corporate capitalism directly. However, its brand of patriotism is identical to that of the RSS/BJP.

In the last three decades, the secular progressive camp has not been able to create a patriotic narrative different from the RSS/

BJP. Till there exists an authentic alternative, the fake, hollow and hypocritical brand of patriotism of the RSS/BJP is bound to prevail, and that is what is happening. Till this situation exists, the country cannot be freed from the real crisis before it—the neoimperialist stranglehold over freedom. This is the big 'achievement' of the RSS/BJP that, by making an alliance with corporate capitalism, it has provided credibility to cowardice and enslavement.

[The author teaches Hindi at Delhi University and is president of the Socialist Party (India).]

The Subversion of MGNREGS

Prabhat Patnaik

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act that brought the MGNREGS into being was a unique piece of legislation in the history of independent India. It stipulated that employment was to be made available on demand, within a fortnight of being asked for, failing which an unemployment allowance had to be paid. True, its scope was confined only to rural areas, and it promised employment only upto 100 days per household per year; but it made employment a right. The fact that it was passed unanimously by parliament, after much deliberation, meant that parliament was in effect creating an economic right and thereby filling an important lacuna of the Indian Constitution, which, as is well-known, guarantees to every citizen only a set of social and political rights but no economic rights.

The MGNREGS therefore broke completely new ground. There had

been anti-poverty programmes earlier, including the well-known food-for-work programme. But they contained no guarantees. There were budgetary provisions for them which could change from one year to the next; and, correspondingly, their scale, limited by the budgetary provision, could also wax and wane. But the MGNREGS was totally different; it offered a guarantee, and in the process not only created an economic right but also gave a deeper meaning to the concept of citizenship. Every citizen, including the most abject mendicant in the country, paid taxes to the State via the indirect levies on what he bought, but the State earlier did practically nothing for the citizen in return. To say that it provided “security” to the citizen meant little, since the “security” it did provide meant little to the poor. The MGNREGS, by contrast, promised to usher in a new era where the State would provide a

degree of economic security to its citizens, which meant something to the poor.

This promise alas has been grossly belied, which is hardly surprising, given the acute class-prejudices, overlaid by the equally acute caste-prejudices, of our ruling classes. (Around 40 percent of the households employed under the MGNREGS every year are estimated to belong to the SC/ST category). The subversion of MGNREGS began under UPA II when Finance Minister Chidambaram effected a cut in real terms in the budgetary provision for the scheme. He defended it on the grounds that since the scheme was demand-driven, more funds would be made available if necessary, and that not much should be read into what was actually provided under the budget. What this meant however was that when demand exceeded what was provided, wage arrears got built up.

Now if the allocation for the scheme does not increase while demand persistently exceeds allocation, then wage arrears accumulate over time. This is exactly what has been happening; wage arrears have kept increasing, which means both that more and more workers under the scheme have remained unpaid during any year and also that the average time required for obtaining wages has kept on increasing.

At a certain point, this very fact began to affect the demand for work under the scheme, as workers discouraged by the non-payment of wages in time began to drop out of it. At the same time a tendency developed to keep down demand through the non-registration of applicants, and not to provide even the registered applicants with work within the stipulated period of time, while not giving them the unemployment payment that was required under the law. What was meant to be an economic right was thus whittled down to just yet another anti-poverty programme at best, where the benefits guaranteed to the jobless poor became a matter of the largesse of the State.

To be sure, even as an anti-poverty programme the MGNREGS remains quite substantial in scope. Since its inception it has employed, at one time or another, nearly one out of every three rural households in the country; and in 2017–18 alone, it employed close to eight crore people, with the average number of days worked per household amounting to 46 in that year. It is clearly the largest employment generation programme in the world.

But with the allocation for the programme becoming progressively more meagre, its scale even as an employment generation programme,

as distinct from an employment guarantee programme, is bound to shrink, and indeed has been shrinking. It has been mentioned above that if allocation remained constant, and below what was required every year, then wage arrears would mount over time. In such a case the net allocation, net of wage arrears, would actually shrink. What has been happening is not even a constancy of allocation, but a reduction in real terms, so that real net allocation, net of wage arrears, has shrunk quite sharply. The inflation-adjusted allocation in 2017–18 for instance was even lower than in 2010–11. Not surprisingly, delayed wage payments accounted for 56 percent of the total wage payments under MGNREGS in 2016–17 compared to 39 percent in 2012–13.

The reduction in gross allocation, i.e. even without counting wage arrears, is particularly sharp when we look at it in relation to the GDP. The World Bank itself had estimated that 1.7 percent of GDP had to be earmarked for this programme if it had to run properly. By contrast the allocation (not the actual expenditure) in 2017–18 was a mere 0.28 percent of GDP, which was even lower than that for 2010–11 (0.58 percent, which marked a particularly good year), and for 2011–12 (0.34 percent). Looking at actual expenditures, net of liabilities of previous years, we find that the share of such net expenditure was 0.36 percent of GDP in 2012–13 but came down to less than 0.30 percent in 2016–17. Hence no matter how we look at the matter, the availability of funds for the MGNREGS relative to GDP has been coming down over the years.

The government of course denies delays in wage-payments. In

fact it has been claiming that more than 90 percent of the wages under the MGNREGS are paid within 15 days; but this is a palpable untruth. A detailed study by a team of researchers conducted on a sample of 3,500 gram panchayats, whose findings were released at a press conference on January 4, 2019 by a group of NGOs in New Delhi, shows that the average delay in wage payments under the MGNREGS amounts to 50 days. This fact, in addition to all the other hurdles that MGNREGS workers face such as being unable to access wages even after they have worked because of the official insistence on the Aadhar link, has been a major factor in dampening demand for work under the programme.

Even the work actually demanded is not provided; and no unemployment allowance is paid in any such case as required by law. In fact it is clear that the MGNREGS has stopped being a demand-driven programme altogether; its scale depends rather on the amount of resources made available for it. A resource crunch for a demand-driven programme is a contradiction in terms: such a programme should have the first claim on the government's budget, since it expresses an economic right of the people, and rights cannot be turned on and off depending upon the availability of funds. The government is obliged to curtail other expenditures which are not reflective of any right of the people in order to fund a programme that is. What we find however is just the opposite, namely that other expenditures claim priority and the funds left over for this programme are simply insufficient to meet the demand for work.

The study mentioned above

finds that even taking the demand for work that is officially registered (a good deal of demand is not even registered on one pretext or another), the actual work provided amounts to only 68 percent of the demand. In other words half as much officially-registered demand for work remains unsatisfied as is actually satisfied; and this ratio has been rising.

We thus not only have an abrogation of an economic right of the people, which is tantamount to an assault on the parliament that had legislated such a right, but a reduction over time in the scale of the programme even when viewed as a simple employment-generating programme.

This is bizarre: the rapid increase in unemployment in the country has attracted much attention of late, and the MGNREGS could be an effective weapon against such unemployment, because of its high multiplier effects, much higher indeed than the multiplier effects of other kinds of government expenditure. If the government was serious about tackling unemployment it should be spending much more on the MGNREGS, instead of letting this programme run to the ground. This however is the current trend.

[Editor's addition: For 2019–20, the central government cut the MGNREGA budget allocation even in absolute terms, to Rs 60,000 crore, as compared to the 2018–19 budget allocation (revised estimate) of Rs 61,084 crore. Clearly, the BJP is deliberately running this programme to the ground.]

(Prabhat Patnaik taught at the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning in Jawaharlal Nehru University from 1974 until his retirement in 2010.)

'NO to War': Appeal to Maintain Peace

Resolution Passed in the 'Save Democracy, Save the Nation' Conference of 'Citizens For Democracy' on March 3, 2019 in New Delhi.

'Citizens For Democracy', set up by Loknayak Jaiprakash Narayan in 1974, views with grave concern the recent growing tension between India and Pakistan and the rise of jingoistic slogans in the country. It is further disturbing to note that the major part of media—print, television, radio, digital, social media, instead of presenting saner voices, have involved themselves in presenting irresponsible views and discussions which help in promoting a mood of war mongering in the country. The public on both sides are sick and tired of being enemies. They want to live in peace so that their children and grand children can grow up in an environment of security and confidence. Going to 'war' means that governments have to divert funds meant for education, health and nutrition towards military expenditure. Such a scenario thwarts progress in all fields—social, economic and cultural. In the midst of widespread poverty and unemployment existing in the both countries, the foremost responsibility of both the governments is to work for promotion of economic

prosperity of their people and resolve their differences by peaceful negotiations. The lessons of history are that 'WAR' is not the ultimate solution. All problems or disputes between nations can be resolved in negotiations in peace. We remind the governments and the people the oft repeated statement made by the veteran journalist late Shri Kuldip Nayar (who was President of the Citizens For Democracy for many years till his demise last year) that: "When Great Britain and France could be friends after fighting wars for more than hundred years, why not India and Pakistan?"

We therefore appeal to the rulers of both the countries not to precipitate any step which may lead to 'war' which can result in no fruitful consequence but only in destruction and suffering for the people on both sides.

S.R. Hiremath, President
N.D.Pancholi, General Secretary
Anil Sinha, Secretary
Manimala, Ram Sharan,
Ramendra, Arun Majhi, Prabhat:
Executive council members.

In a survey of experts done in 2018, India ranks as the world's most dangerous country for women. It had ranked 4th in the same survey done 7 years ago. The Global Gender Gap Index 2017 by the World Economic Forum placed India at 108 position out of 144 countries benchmarked on the basis of gender parity in the fields of economic participation, education, health and political empowerment. India ranked 131 out of 153 countries in the global Women, Peace, and Security Index 2017–18, that is based upon 11 indicators incorporating inclusion, justice, and security. Despite women accounting for 49% of India's population, only 12% of the seats in the national legislature are held by them. The female labour force participation rate in India fell from 37% in 2006 to 27% in 2017, as per World Bank report, ranking India at 163 out of 181 countries.

Survival of the Richest: All Are Equal, Except Those Who Aren't

Nomi Prins

Like a gilded coating that makes the duller things glitter, today's thin veneer of political populism covers a grotesque underbelly of growing inequality that's hiding in plain sight. And this phenomenon of ever more concentrated wealth and power has both Newtonian and Darwinian components to it.

In terms of Newton's first law of motion: those in power will remain in power unless acted upon by an external force. Those who are wealthy will only gain in wealth as long as nothing deflects them from their present course. As for Darwin, in the world of financial evolution, those with wealth or power will do what's in their best interest to protect that wealth, even if it's in no one else's interest at all.

In George Orwell's iconic 1945 novel, *Animal Farm*, the pigs who gain control in a rebellion against a human farmer eventually impose a dictatorship on the other animals on the basis of a single commandment: "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others." In terms of the American republic, the modern equivalent would be: "All citizens are equal, but the wealthy are so much more equal than anyone else (and plan to remain that way)."

Certainly, inequality is the economic great wall between those with power and those without it.

As the animals of Orwell's farm grew ever less equal, so in the present moment in a country that still claims equal opportunity for its citizens, one in which three Americans now have as much wealth

as the bottom half of society (160 million people), you could certainly say that we live in an increasingly Orwellian society. Or perhaps an increasingly Twainian one.

After all, Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner wrote a classic 1873 novel that put an unforgettable label on their moment and could do the same for ours. *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today* depicted the greed and political corruption of post-Civil War America. Its title caught the spirit of what proved to be a long moment when the uber-rich came to dominate Washington and the rest of America. It was a period saturated with robber barons, professional grifters, and incomprehensibly wealthy banking magnates. (Anything sound familiar?) The main difference between that last century's gilded moment and this one was that those robber barons built tangible things like railroads. Today's equivalent crew of the mega-wealthy build remarkably intangible things like tech and electronic platforms, while a grifter of a president opts for the only new infrastructure in sight, a great wall to nowhere.

In Twain's epoch, the US was emerging from the Civil War. Opportunists were rising from the ashes of the nation's battered soul. Land speculation, government lobbying, and shady deals soon converged to create an unequal society of the first order (at least until now). Soon after their novel came out, a series of recessions ravaged the country, followed by a 1907 financial panic in New York City

caused by a speculator-led copper-market scam.

From the late 1890s on, the most powerful banker on the planet, J.P. Morgan, was called upon multiple times to bail out a country on the economic edge. In 1907, Treasury Secretary George Cortelyou provided him with \$25 million in bailout money at the request of President Theodore Roosevelt to stabilize Wall Street and calm frantic citizens trying to withdraw their deposits from banks around the country. And this Morgan did—by helping his friends and their companies, while skimming money off the top himself. As for the most troubled banks holding the savings of ordinary people? Well, they folded. (Shades of the 2007–08 meltdown and bailout anyone?)

The leading bankers who had received that bounty from the government went on to cause the Crash of 1929. Not surprisingly, much speculation and fraud preceded it. In those years, the novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald caught the era's spirit of grotesque inequality in *The Great Gatsby* when one of his characters comments: "Let me tell you about the very rich. They are different from you and me." The same could certainly be said of today when it comes to the gaping maw between the have-nots and have-a-lots.

Income vs. Wealth

To fully grasp the nature of inequality in our twenty-first-century gilded age, it's important to understand the difference between wealth and income and what kinds

of inequality stem from each. Simply put, income is how much money you make in terms of paid work or any return on investments or assets (or other things you own that have the potential to change in value). Wealth is simply the gross accumulation of those very assets and any return or appreciation on them. The more wealth you have, the easier it is to have a higher annual income.

Let's break that down. If you earn \$31,000 a year, the median salary for an individual in the United States today, your income would be that amount minus associated taxes (including federal, state, social security, and Medicare ones). On average, that means you would be left with about \$26,000 before other expenses kicked in.

If your wealth is \$1,000,000, however, and you put that into a savings account paying 2.25% interest, you could receive about \$22,500 and, after taxes, be left with about \$19,000, for doing nothing whatsoever.

To put all this in perspective, the top 1% of Americans now take home, on average, more than 40 times the incomes of the bottom 90%. And if you head for the top 0.1%, those figures only radically worsen. That tiny crew takes home more than 198 times the income of the bottom 90% percent. They also possess as much wealth as the nation's bottom 90%. "Wealth," as Adam Smith so classically noted almost two-and-a-half-centuries ago in *The Wealth of Nations*, "is power," an adage that seldom, sadly, seems outdated.

A Case Study: Wealth, Inequality, and the Federal Reserve

Obviously, if you inherit wealth in this country, you're instantly

ahead of the game. In America, a third to nearly a half of all wealth is inherited rather than self-made. According to a *New York Times* investigation, for instance, President Donald Trump, from birth, received an estimated \$413 million (in today's dollars, that is) from his dear old dad and another \$140 million (in today's dollars) in loans. Not a bad way for a "businessman" to begin building the empire (of bankruptcies) that became the platform for a presidential campaign that oozed into actually running the country. Trump did it, in other words, the old-fashioned way—through inheritance.

In his megalomaniacal zeal to declare a national emergency at the southern border, that gilded millionaire-turned-billionaire-turned-president provides but one of many examples of a long record of abusing power. Unfortunately, in this country, few people consider record inequality (which is still growing) as another kind of abuse of power, another kind of great wall, in this case keeping not Central Americans but most US citizens out.

The Federal Reserve, the country's central bank that dictates the cost of money and that sustained Wall Street in the wake of the financial crisis of 2007–08 (and since), has finally pointed out that such extreme levels of inequality are bad news for the rest of the country. As Fed Chairman Jerome Powell said at a town hall in Washington in early February, "We want prosperity to be widely shared. We need policies to make that happen." Sadly, the Fed has largely contributed to increasing the systemic inequality now engrained in the financial and, by extension, political system. In a recent research paper, the Fed did, at least, underscore the consequences

of inequality to the economy, showing that "income inequality can generate low aggregate demand, deflation pressure, excessive credit growth, and financial instability."

In the wake of the global economic meltdown, however, the Fed took it upon itself to reduce the cost of money for big banks by chopping interest rates to zero (before eventually raising them to 2.5%) and buying \$4.5 trillion in Treasury and mortgage bonds to lower it further. All this so that banks could ostensibly lend money more easily to Main Street and stimulate the economy. As Senator Bernie Sanders noted though, "The Federal Reserve provided more than \$16 trillion in total financial assistance to some of the largest financial institutions and corporations in the United States and throughout the world. . . . a clear case of socialism for the rich and rugged, you're-on-your-own individualism for everyone else."

The economy has been trading water ever since (especially compared to the stock market). Annual gross domestic product growth has not surpassed 3% in any year since the financial crisis, even as the level of the stock market tripled, grotesquely increasing the country's inequality gap. None of this should have been surprising, since much of the excess money went straight to big banks, rich investors and speculators. They then used it to invest in the stock and bond markets, but not in things that would matter to all the Americans outside that great wall of wealth.

The question is: Why are inequality and a flawed economic system mutually reinforcing? As a starting point, those able to invest in a stock market buoyed by the Fed's

policies only increased their wealth exponentially. In contrast, those relying on the economy to sustain them via wages and other income got shafted. Most people aren't, of course, invested in the stock market, or really in anything. They can't afford to be. It's important to remember that nearly 80% of the population lives paycheck to paycheck.

The net result: an acute post-financial-crisis increase in wealth inequality—on top of the income inequality that was global but especially true in the United States. The crew in the top 1% that doesn't rely on salaries to increase their wealth prospered fabulously. They, after all, now own more than half of all national wealth invested in stocks and mutual funds, so a soaring stock market disproportionately helps them. It's also why the Federal Reserve subsidy policies to Wall Street banks have only added to the extreme wealth of those extreme few.

The Ramifications of Inequality

The list of negatives resulting from such inequality is long indeed. As a start, the only thing the majority of Americans possess a greater proportion of than that top 1% is a mountain of debt.

The bottom 90% are the lucky owners of about three-quarters of the country's household debt. Mortgages, auto loans, student loans, and credit-card debt are cumulatively at a record-high \$13.5 trillion.

And that's just to start down a slippery slope. As Inequality.org reports, wealth and income inequality impact "everything from life expectancy to infant mortality and obesity." High economic inequality

and poor health, for instance, go hand and hand, or put another way, inequality compromises the overall health of the country. According to academic findings, income inequality is, in the most literal sense, making Americans sick. As one study put it, "Diseased and impoverished economic infrastructures [help] lead to diseased or impoverished or unbalanced bodies or minds."

Then there's Social Security, established in 1935 as a federal supplement for those in need who have also paid into the system through a tax on their wages. Today, all workers contribute 6.2% of their annual earnings and employers pay the other 6.2% (up to a cap of \$132,900) into the Social Security system. Those making far more than that, specifically millionaires and billionaires, don't have to pay a dime more on a proportional basis. In practice, that means about 94% of American workers and their employers paid the full 12.4% of their annual earnings toward Social Security, while the other 6% paid an often significantly smaller fraction of their earnings.

According to his own claims about his 2016 income, for instance, President Trump "contributed a mere 0.002 percent of his income to Social Security in 2016." That means it would take nearly 22,000 additional workers earning the median US salary to make up for what he doesn't have to pay. And the greater the income inequality in this country, the more money those who make less have to put into the Social Security system on a proportional basis. In recent years, a staggering \$1.4 trillion could have gone into that system, if there were no arbitrary payroll cap favoring the wealthy.

Inequality: A Dilemma With Global Implications

America is great at minting millionaires. It has the highest concentration of them, globally speaking, at 41%. (Another 24% of that millionaires' club can be found in Europe.) And the top 1% of US citizens earn 40 times the national average and own about 38.6% of the country's total wealth. The highest figure in any other developed country is "only" 28%.

However, while the US boasts of epic levels of inequality, it's also a global trend. Consider this: the world's richest 1% own 45% of total wealth on this planet. In contrast, 64% of the population (with an average of \$10,000 in wealth to their name) holds less than 2%. And to widen the inequality picture a bit more, the world's richest 10%, those having at least \$100,000 in assets, own 84% of total global wealth.

The billionaires' club is where it's really at, though. According to Oxfam, the richest 42 billionaires have a combined wealth equal to that of the poorest 50% of humanity. Rest assured, however, that in this gilded century there's inequality even among billionaires. After all, the 10 richest among them possess \$745 billion in total global wealth. The next 10 down the list possess a mere \$451.5 billion, and why even bother tallying the next 10 when you get the picture?

Oxfam also recently reported that "the number of billionaires has almost doubled, with a new billionaire created every two days between 2017 and 2018. They have now more wealth than ever before while almost half of humanity have barely escaped extreme poverty, living on less than \$5.50 a day."

How Does It End?

In sum, the rich are only getting richer and it's happening at a historic rate. Worse yet, over the past decade, there was an extra perk for the truly wealthy. They could bulk up on assets that had been devalued due to the financial crisis, while so many of their peers on the other side of that great wall of wealth were economically decimated by the 2007–08 meltdown and have yet to fully recover.

What we've seen ever since is how money just keeps flowing upward through banks and massive speculation, while the economic lives of those not at the top of the financial food chain have largely remained stagnant or worse. The result is, of course, sweeping inequality of a kind that, in much of the last century, might have seemed inconceivable.

Eventually, we will all have to face the black cloud this throws over the entire economy. Real people in the real world, those not at the top, have experienced a decade of ever greater instability, while the inequality gap of this beyond-gilded age is sure to shape a truly messy world ahead. In other words, this can't end well.

(Nomi Prins, a former Wall Street executive, is the author of several books.)

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My Home and My Heart

Fernando Macarro Castillo

My home and my heart
Dream of freedom.

If one day I go out into life
My home will have no keys:
Always open, like the sea,
The sun and the air.

Let night and day enter,
And the blue rain, the evening,
The red bread of the dawn;
The moon, my sweet lover.

Do not let friendship halt
Its steps at my threshold,
Nor the swallow its flight,
Nor love its lips. No-one.

My home and heart
Never closed: come on in
Birds, friends,
The sun and the air.

[Fernando Macarro Castillo, popularly known as Marcos Ana (1920-2016), is considered to among Spain's greatest socialist poets. He spent 23 years in the prisons of the Spanish dictator Franco. While in the prison, Marcos Ana wrote beautiful verse, hopeful verse, including the poem above.]

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Reasons and Solutions

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Release Lingraj Azad Immediately!

NAPM, March 6, 2019

NAPM (National Alliance of Peoples's Movements) condemns the illegal and deceitful arrest of Lingraj Azad today by Odisha police. He is the leader of Niyamgiri Suraksha Parishad, who successfully fought the valiant struggle against Vedanta corporation along with Dongria Kondh. Initially it was reported that he has been arrested in an old case but just now we have learnt that sedition charges has also been slapped against him. (More details are awaited)

Lingraj Bhai is a fierce fighter for the rights of the adivasis and one of the tallest leaders of Odisha and national VP of Samajwadi Jan Parishad and National Convener of NAPM.

Arrests and attacks are not new to him in nearly three decades of his activism. He has faced physical attacks and harassment from the State for his struggle against the systemic oppression and corporate loot of the natural resources.

We condemn this brazen attack and arrest by Odisha government just before elections and planned morcha in Bhubaneswar on March 11th and on the continued violations of rights in Niyamgiri hills.

We demand immediate release of Lingraj Azad and restoration of his rights and an end to corporate and State terror in Niyamgiri hills.

Janata

is available at

www.lohiatoday.com

'Defy the Thought Police', Stand With Assange

John Pilger

Whenever I visit Julian Assange, we meet in a room he knows too well. There is a bare table and pictures of Ecuador on the walls. There is a bookcase where the books never change. The curtains are always drawn and there is no natural light. The air is still and fetid.

This is Room 101.

Before I enter Room 101, I must surrender my passport and phone. My pockets and possessions are examined. The food I bring is inspected.

The man who guards Room 101 sits in what looks like an old-fashioned telephone box. He watches a screen, watching Julian. There are others unseen, agents of the state, watching and listening.

Cameras are everywhere in Room 101. To avoid them, Julian maneuvers us both into a corner, side by side, flat up against the wall. This is how we catch up: whispering and writing to each other on a notepad, which he shields from the cameras. Sometimes we laugh.

I have my designated time slot. When that expires, the door in Room 101 bursts open and the guard says, "Time is up!" On New Year's Eve, I was allowed an extra 30 minutes and the man in the phone box wished me a happy new year, but not Julian.

Of course, Room 101 is the room in George Orwell's prophetic novel, 1984, where the thought police watched and tormented their prisoners, and worse, until people surrendered their humanity and principles and obeyed Big Brother.

Julian Assange will never obey Big Brother. His resilience and courage are astonishing, even though

his physical health struggles to keep up.

Julian is a distinguished Australian, who has changed the way many people think about duplicitous governments. For this, he is a political refugee subjected to what the United Nations calls "arbitrary detention".

The UN says he has the right of free passage to freedom, but this is denied. He has the right to medical treatment without fear of arrest, but this is denied. He has the right to compensation, but this is denied.

As founder and editor of WikiLeaks, his crime has been to make sense of dark times. WikiLeaks has an impeccable record of accuracy and authenticity which no newspaper, no TV channel, no radio station, no BBC, no New York Times, no Washington Post, no Guardian can equal. Indeed, it shames them.

That explains why he is being punished.

For example:

Last week, the International Court of Justice ruled that the British government had no legal powers over the Chagos Islanders, who in the 1960s and 70s, were expelled in secret from their homeland on Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean and sent into exile and poverty. Countless children died, many of them from sadness. It was an epic crime few knew about.

For almost 50 years, the British have denied the islanders' the right to return to their homeland, which they had given to the Americans for a major military base.

In 2009, the British Foreign

Office concocted a "marine reserve" around the Chagos archipelago.

This touching concern for the environment was exposed as a fraud when WikiLeaks published a secret cable from the British government reassuring the Americans that "the former inhabitants would find it difficult, if not impossible, to pursue their claim for resettlement on the islands if the entire Chagos Archipelago were a marine reserve."

The truth of the conspiracy clearly influenced the momentous decision of the International Court of Justice.

WikiLeaks has also revealed how the United States spies on its allies; how the CIA can watch you through your I-phone; how presidential candidate Hillary Clinton took vast sums of money from Wall Street for secret speeches that reassured the bankers that if she was elected, she would be their friend.

In 2016, WikiLeaks revealed a direct connection between Clinton and organised jihadism in the Middle East: terrorists, in other words. One email disclosed that when Clinton was US secretary of state, she knew that Saudi Arabia and Qatar were funding the Islamic State group, yet she accepted huge donations for her foundation from both governments.

She then approved the world's biggest ever arms sale to her Saudi benefactors: arms that are currently being used against the stricken people of Yemen.

That explains why he is being punished.

WikiLeaks has also published more than 800,000 secret files from Russia, including the Kremlin, telling

us more about the machinations of power in that country than the specious hysterics of the Russiagate pantomime in Washington.

This is real journalism—journalism of a kind now considered exotic: the antithesis of Vichy journalism, which speaks for the enemy of the people and takes its sobriquet from the Vichy government that occupied France on behalf of the Nazis.

Vichy journalism is censorship by omission, such as the untold scandal of the collusion between Australian governments and the United States to deny Julian Assange his rights as an Australian citizen and to silence him.

In 2010, Prime Minister Julia Gillard went as far as ordering the Australian Federal Police to investigate and hopefully prosecute Assange and WikiLeaks—until she was informed by the AFP that no crime had been committed.

Last weekend, the *Sydney Morning Herald* published a lavish supplement promoting a celebration of "Me Too" at the Sydney Opera House on March 10. Among the leading participants is the recently retired Minister of Foreign Affairs, Julie Bishop.

Bishop has been on shows in the local media lately, lauded as a loss to politics: an "icon," someone called her, to be admired.

The elevation to celebrity feminism of one so politically primitive as Bishop tells us how much so-called identity politics have subverted an essential, objective truth: that what matters, above all, is not your gender but the class you serve.

Before she entered politics, Julie Bishop was a lawyer who served the notorious asbestos miner James Hardie which fought claims by men

and their families dying horribly with black lung disease.

Lawyer Peter Gordon recalls Bishop "rhetorically asking the court why workers should be entitled to jump court queues just because they were dying."

Bishop says she "acted on instructions ... professionally and ethically."

Perhaps she was merely "acting on instructions" when she flew to London and Washington last year with her ministerial chief of staff, who had indicated that the Australian Foreign Minister would raise Julian's case and hopefully begin the diplomatic process of bringing him home.

Julian's father had written a moving letter to the then Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, asking the government to intervene diplomatically to free his son. He told Turnbull that he was worried Julian might not leave the embassy alive.

Julie Bishop had every opportunity in the UK and the US to present a diplomatic solution that would bring Julian home. But this required the courage of one proud to represent a sovereign, independent state, not a vassal.

Instead, she made no attempt to contradict the British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, when he said outrageously that Julian "faced serious charges." What charges? There were no charges.

Australia's Foreign Minister abandoned her duty to speak up for an Australian citizen, prosecuted with nothing, charged with nothing, guilty of nothing.

Will those feminists who fawn over this false icon at the Opera House next Sunday be reminded of her role in colluding with foreign forces to punish an Australian

journalist, one whose work has revealed that rapacious militarism has smashed the lives of millions of ordinary women in many countries: in Iraq alone, the US-led invasion of that country, in which Australia participated, left 700,000 widows.

So what can be done?

An Australian government that was prepared to act in response to a public campaign to rescue the refugee football player, Hakeem al-Araibi, from torture and persecution in Bahrain, is capable of bringing Julian Assange home. The refusal by the Department of Foreign Affairs in Canberra to honor the United Nations' declaration that Julian is the victim of "arbitrary detention" and has a fundamental right to his freedom, is a shameful breach of the letter and spirit of international law.

Why has the Australian government made no serious attempt to free Assange? Why did Julie Bishop bow to the wishes of two foreign powers? Why is this democracy traduced by its servile relationships, and integrated with lawless foreign power?

The persecution of Julian Assange is the conquest of us all: of our independence, our self respect, our intellect, our compassion, our politics, our culture.

So stop scrolling. Organise. Occupy. Insist. Persist. Make a noise. Take direct action. Be brave and stay brave. Defy the thought police.

War is not peace, freedom is not slavery, ignorance is not strength. If Julian can stand up, so can you: so can all of us.

(John Pilger, renowned investigative journalist and documentary film-maker, is one of only two to have twice won British journalism's top award.)

‘United We Will Rise’

Imogen Calderwood

This year, the world is witnessing one of the biggest youth-driven social movements of all time.

Tens of thousands of children and teenagers have already walked out of school in protest against the alarming lack of immediate action being taken against climate change.

And now, climate strikers have published an open letter in the Guardian pledging to “change the fate of humanity, whether you like it or not”—and it’s honestly spine-tinglingly powerful.

“We, the young, are deeply concerned about our future,” the letter begins. “Humanity is currently causing the sixth mass extinction of species and the global climate system is at the brink of a catastrophic crisis. Its devastating impacts are already felt by millions of people around the globe.

“Young people make up more than half of the global population,” it continues. “Our generation grew up with the climate crisis and we will have to deal with it for the rest of our lives. Despite that fact, most of us are not included in the local and global decision-making process. We are the voiceless future of humanity.

“We will no longer accept this injustice. We demand justice for all past, current, and future victims of the climate crisis, and so we are rising up.”

The next stage of this rise will come on March 15 — when the #FridaysforFuture school strike will come again on an unprecedented scale, with the letter vowing that “we will protest on every continent.”

Currently, according to the Guardian, there are about 500 marches planned for March 15, across 51 countries.

The global, uncentralised nature of the movement is making it almost impossible to properly chart, but it’s fair to say that it is literally sweeping across the world—with marches already planned across western Europe, the US, the UK, Brazil, Chile, Australia, Iran, India and Japan, to name a few.

The demands of the strikers are simple: urging world leaders to “treat the climate crisis as a crisis” and take action accordingly.

The letter echoes the call of 16-year-old Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, credited with having sparked the current movement, through her solo protests. Back in August, Thunberg decided that she wouldn’t go to school on Fridays, and would instead protest climate change outside the Swedish parliament buildings.

She then took the world by storm at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January, delivering a speech that went viral and piled pressure on world leaders to step up their action.

“Adults keep saying: ‘We owe it to the young people to give them hope.’ But I don’t want your hope,” she told the audience in Davos. “I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act.

“I want you to act as you would in a crisis,” she continued. “I want

you to act as if our house is on fire. Because it is.”

As the strikers point out in the letter, published on Friday, climate change is the “biggest threat in human history.”

“We will not accept a life in fear and devastation,” the letter continues. “We have the right to live our dreams and hopes. Climate change is already happening. People did die, are dying, and will die because of it, but we can and will stop this madness.

“United we will rise until we see climate justice,” it reads. “We demand the world’s decision-makers take responsibility and solve this crisis. You have failed us in the past. If you continue failing us in the future, we, the young people, will make change happen by ourselves.”

It finishes with this (and yes, we have goosebumps):

“The youth of this world has started to move and we will not rest again.”

(Imogen is content writer and editor at Global Citizen UK.)

Full Text of the Letter

We, the young, are deeply concerned about our future. Humanity is currently causing the sixth mass extinction of species and the global climate system is at the brink of a catastrophic crisis. Its devastating impacts are already felt by millions of people around the globe. Yet we are far from reaching the goals of the Paris agreement.

Young people make up more than half of the global population. Our generation grew up with the climate crisis and we will have to deal with it for the rest of our lives. Despite that fact, most of us are not included in the local and global decision-making process. We are the voiceless future of humanity.

We will no longer accept this injustice. We demand justice for all past, current and future victims of the climate crisis, and so we are rising up. Thousands of us have taken to the streets in the past weeks all around the world. Now we will make our voices heard. On 15 March, we will protest on every continent.

We finally need to treat the climate crisis as a crisis. It is the biggest threat in human history and we will not accept the world's decision-makers' inaction that threatens our entire civilisation. We will not accept a life in fear and devastation. We have the right to live our dreams and hopes. Climate change is already happening. People did die, are dying and will die because of it, but we can and will stop this madness.

We, the young, have started to move. We are going to change the fate of humanity, whether you like it or not. United we will rise until we see climate justice. We demand the world's decision-makers take responsibility and solve this crisis.

You have failed us in the past. If you continue failing us in the future, we, the young people, will make change happen by ourselves. The youth of this world has started to move and we will not rest again.

The global coordination group of the youth-led climate strike.

Washington Plots Regime Change in Caracas

Nick Everett

The Trump administration set a 23 February deadline for Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro to bow to US demands and cede power to self-appointed “president” Juan Guaidó. Sanctions imposed by former US president Barack Obama have been extended and deepened, costing Venezuela \$38 billion over the last three years, according to Venezuela's vice president of planning, Ricardo Menéndez.

US president Donald Trump has become increasingly bellicose in his threats against Maduro's government, refusing to rule out a ground invasion if Maduro's own generals fail to depose him. Trump has assembled a coterie of Cold Warriors pushing for military intervention, including vice president Mike Pence, secretary of state Mike Pompeo, national security adviser John Bolton and the recently appointed special envoy to Venezuela, Elliott Abrams.

“Elliott will be a true asset to our mission to help the Venezuelan people fully restore democracy and prosperity to their country”, Pompeo told reporters following Abrams' appointment on 25 January. Abrams is a man with “passion for the rights and liberties of all peoples”, asserted Pompeo. However, Abrams has a sordid history of fomenting murder and mayhem in aid of US foreign policy in Latin America.

A graduate of Harvard law school, Abrams began his public service career in 1981, soon after Republican president Ronald Reagan assumed office. In December 1981,

after Reagan's top pick for the post of assistant secretary of state for human rights and humanitarian affairs was exposed as a racist, Abrams was elevated to the job.

That year the Reagan administration dramatically increased military aid to El Salvador's ruling junta. By 1982, US military advisers had been assigned to each of the six Salvadoran brigades, as well as 10 smaller units. During the 12 years of the Reagan and Bush administrations, El Salvador's dictatorship was lavished with \$6 billion in economic and military aid. 75,000 Salvadorians lost their lives in a one-sided civil war in which the ruling military junta carried out 95 percent of the atrocities, according to a subsequent truth commission.

Washington's Dirty War in Central America

El Salvador was one of a series of feared “dominoes” in Central America threatened by “communism”, a tag frequently attached to any government or guerrilla movement that failed to do Washington's bidding. In El Salvador that movement was the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN). Now the governing party of El Salvador (shorn of its former leftist ideology), the FMLN then led a popular guerrilla insurgency against El Salvador's ruling landlords and generals.

In Nicaragua, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) had taken power in 1979 after toppling the US-backed Somoza

dictatorship. The FSLN's efforts to build a popular democracy and combat poverty in Nicaragua were soon thwarted by a reactionary mercenary movement, known as the "contras", aided and abetted by Washington. Lauded as "freedom fighters" by Reagan, contras carried out attacks on schools, clinics and even childcare centres established by Sandinista mass organisations. Like the efforts of their paramilitary counterparts in other Central American countries, the contras' campaign of terror involved torture, rape and murder, resulting in the deaths of 10,000 Nicaraguans.

In Guatemala, where a US-backed coup d'état had deposed reformist president Jacobo Arbenz in 1954, a series of authoritarian rulers used fraudulent elections and military coups to hold power. One of those was General Ríos Montt, who was subsequently found responsible for the killing and disappearance of more than 1,700 indigenous Maya during his 1982–83 rule. Like José Napoleon Duarte, who had become head of El Salvador's military junta in 1980, Montt was the recipient of large-scale US economic and military aid.

Covering Up Massacres in El Salvador and Guatemala

On 10 December 1981, two days prior to Abram's taking office as assistant secretary of state, the US-trained Atlacatl Battalion entered the village of El Mazote, in El Salvador's mountainous northeast. The following morning, the entire village population—733 men, women and children—were herded into the town square and accused of being FMLN insurgents. Men and women were separated, and children were forced into a small building

next to the village church, known as the convent. The following day, men were blindfolded, tortured and killed by decapitation or shooting. Women and girls were marched into the forest, before being raped and murdered. Finally, the "Angels of Hell", as they were known, fired a barrage of bullets into the convent and set it aflame.

A decade later an exhumation found 143 bodies in that building; their average age was just 6 years. Nearly a thousand Salvadorans are believed to have perished in this massacre and others that followed in neighbouring villages.

On 27 January 1982, reports of the Mazote massacre appeared in the Washington Post and New York Times. The next day, the State Department filed a report certifying that the Salvadoran regime was making "a concerted and significant effort to comply with internationally recognised human rights" and working "to bring an end to the indiscriminate torture and murder of Salvadoran citizens". On 8 February, Abrams told a Senate committee that the "incident is at least being significantly misused, at the very best, by the guerrillas". The reports, he claimed, were "nothing but communist propaganda".

Abrams was also quizzed about the March 1980 assassination of popular Salvadoran archbishop Oscar Romero, killed on orders from Major Roberto D'Aubuisson, then operating a paramilitary death squad in collaboration with US intelligence. "Anybody who thinks you're going to find a cable that says that Roberto D'Aubuisson murdered the archbishop is a fool", asserted Abrams. The State Department was in possession of not one, but

two, embassy cables detailing D'Aubuisson's role in organising the killing.

Abrams similarly brushed off reports of massacres in Guatemala. In 1985, Guatemalan human rights activist Maria Rosario Godoy was abducted, tortured, raped and murdered, together with her 21-year-old brother and her 2-year-old son. The toddler was not spared: his fingernails were ripped off before he was killed. Abrams insisted that the Guatemalan regime's official story—that the three died in an auto accident—should be believed.

In 1983, Abrams defended Reagan's lifting of an embargo on military aid to Montt's government, claiming that human rights abuses were "being reduced step by step" and that it was "progress" that had to be "rewarded and encouraged". A UN commission later found that the Guatemalan state was responsible for 93 percent of the human rights violations that took place during the nation's civil war.

Aiding the Contras in Nicaragua

Abrams, along with National Security Council member Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, was a central figure in a covert and illegal operation funding the CIA-organised contras. The operation was launched in 1985 after Congress enacted legislation barring US military aid for the Nicaraguan mercenaries.

In 1986, North, Abrams and CIA Central America chief Alan Fiers smuggled military aid to the contras under the guise of "humanitarian aid". Abrams also flew to London (using the alias of "Mr Kenilworth") to solicit a \$10 million donation from the sultan of Brunei. At the same time, Abrams testified before Congress that the Reagan administration had

no links whatsoever to supposedly private financing of contras. Abrams denied any knowledge that North had directed illegal arms sales to Iran and diverted the proceeds to the contras.

Determined to resist any restraint from Congress on implementing Washington's dirty war in Latin America, Abrams railed against US legislators, describing them as "pious clowns" and "abysmally stupid". To Abrams, the price of savagery and brutality inflicted by the contras was worth it. In 1989 he told Policy Review that "the contras were an enormous success".

In 1991, Abrams pleaded guilty to two counts of lying to Congress under oath in relation to the Iran-contra conspiracy in a deal to avoid a felony prosecution and potential jail time. Yet Abrams' time in the dog house was brief. The following year, president Bush senior pardoned him.

Plotting Regime Change from Baghdad to Caracas

In 2002, president Bush junior appointed Abrams to the National Security Council. Alongside several Reagan era officials associated with the neoconservative Project for the New American Century (PNAC), Abrams called for regime change in Iraq. In a paper drafted for the PNAC, Abrams declared that Washington "should not permit the establishment of a Palestinian state that did not explicitly uphold US policy in the region".

In 1989, before his fall from grace, Abrams executed a well-planned strategy to oust former US ally and Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega. Abrams first threatened sanctions, then gained Congressional support for imposing sanctions, then established a Panamanian

government in exile on a US military base. Finally, in a New York Times opinion piece published in October 1989, Abrams called openly for the US military to topple Noriega. Two months later, Bush heeded his advice. Democracy was "restored" at a cost of 3,000 Panamanian lives.

Today, we are seeing the same strategy being played out in Venezuela.

On 21 February, the US State Department announced that Abrams will lead a US government delegation transporting "humanitarian supplies" from Florida to Colombia in military aircraft. Both the UN and the Red Cross have slammed the move as a political manoeuvre. The "aid" shipment follows a benefit concert organised by British billionaire Richard Branson at the Colombia-Venezuela border, with a guest appearance by Guaidó, all staged for the benefit of US and European TV networks.

Pence is also on his way to Bogotá "to voice the United States' unwavering support for interim President Juan Guaidó and highlight the Venezuelan people's fight for democracy over dictatorship", according to a White House media statement.

We have seen all this before. As with Reagan's dirty war in Central America, and Bush's war on Iraq, Trump, Pence, Bolton and Abrams' sabre rattling is aimed at shoring up US geopolitical influence and access to oil. We must stop them in their tracks with a powerful anti-war movement that defends the right of Venezuelans—not the US—to decide who governs them.

(Nick Everett is an activist with Socialist Alternative, Australia.)

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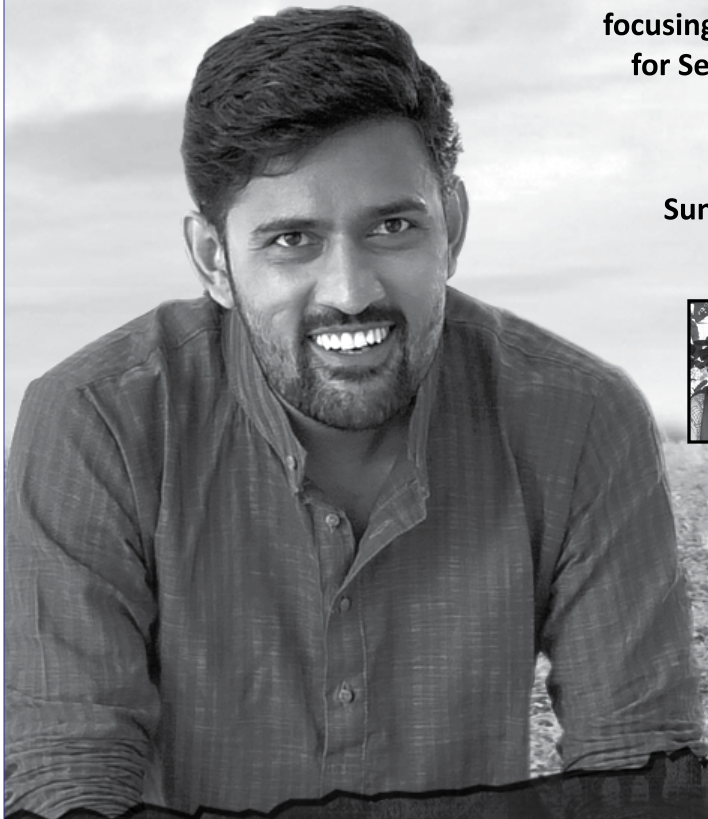
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Youth Climate Strike Friday, March 15, 2019

In a most inspiring development, hundreds of Youth Climate Strike groups have appeared around the world after Greta Thunberg's courageous one-person protest in Sweden caught fire. They have called for a global Youth Climate Strike on March 15th. Below we reproduce the mission statement and demands of the US Youth Climate Strike, one of these youth groups.

—Editors

Our Mission

We, the youth of America, are striking because decades of inaction has left us with just 11 years to change the trajectory of the worst effects of climate change, according to the October 2018 UN IPCC Report. We are striking because our world leaders have yet to acknowledge, prioritise, or properly address our climate crisis. We are striking because marginalised communities across our nation—especially communities of color, disabled communities, and low-income communities—are already disproportionately impacted by climate change. We are striking because if the social order is disrupted by our refusal to attend school, then the system is forced to face the climate crisis and enact change. With our futures at stake, we call for radical legislative

action to combat climate change and its countless detrimental effects on the American people. We are striking for the Green New Deal, for a fair and just transition to a 100% renewable economy, and for ending the creation of additional fossil fuel infrastructure. Additionally, we believe the climate crisis should be declared a national emergency because we are running out of time.

Our Demands

Green New Deal

- An equitable transition for marginalized communities that will be most impacted by climate change;
- An equitable transition for fossil-fuel reliant communities to a renewable economy;
- 100% renewable energy by 2030;
- Upgrading the current electric grid;
- No creation of additional fossil fuel infrastructure (pipelines, coal plants, fracking etc.);
- The creation of a committee to oversee the implementation of a Green New Deal:
 - That has subpoena power;
 - Committee members can't take fossil fuel industry donations;
 - Accepts climate science.

A halt in any and all fossil fuel infrastructure projects

- Fossil fuel infrastructure disproportionately impacts indigenous communities and communities of colour in a negative way;
- Creating new fossil fuel infrastructure would create new reliance on fossil fuels at a time of urgency.

All decisions made by the government be tied in scientific research, including the 2018 IPCC report

- The world needs to reduce GHG emissions by 50% by 2030, and 100% by 2050;
- We need to incorporate this fact into all policymaking.

Declaring a National Emergency on Climate Change

- This calls for a national emergency because we have 11 years to avoid catastrophic climate change;
- Since the US has empirically been a global leader, we should be a leader on climate action;
- Since the US largely contributes to global GHG emissions, we should be leading the fight in GHG reduction.

Compulsory comprehensive education on climate change and its impacts throughout grades K-8

- K-8 is the ideal age range for compulsory climate change education because:
 - Impressionability is high during that developmental stage, therefore it's easier for children and young adults to learn about climate change in a more in-depth manner, and retain that information;

- Climate change becomes a nonpartisan issue, as it truly is because it's based solely on science from the beginning.

Preserving our public lands and wildlife

- Diverse ecosystems and national parks will be very impacted by climate change, therefore it's important that we work to the best of our abilities to preserve their existence.

Keeping our water supply clean

- Clean water is essential for all living beings, when we pollute our water supply, or the water supply of someone else, it's simply a violation of an essential human right.

Our Solutions

These are not the sole solutions, these are just some solutions that we approve of. To be effective, these solutions need to be implemented at a large scale by the United States government:

- **The extraction of Greenhouse Gases from the atmosphere:**
 - Reforestation—replenishing our forests by planting trees and allowing them to thrive, sustainable forestry;
 - Reduced food waste—methane emissions from rotting food in landfills contributes immensely to overall Greenhouse Gases emissions.
- **Emission standards and benchmarks:**
 - We need to create standards and benchmarks for reducing Greenhouse Gases that align with those expressed by the science community to avoid

- 1.5° Celsius warming.
- **Changing the agriculture industry:**
 - Less carbon-intensive farming;
 - More plant-based farming.
- **Using renewable energy and building renewable energy infrastructure.**
- **Stopping the unsustainable and dangerous process of fracking.**
- **Stop mountaintop removal/mining:**
 - It is very harmful to our environment and people working in these field.

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India: Liberal Democracy and the Extreme Right

Aijaz Ahmad

(Note: This article is excerpted from a longer article, and we are publishing it as a single piece rather than in two parts because of its importance.)

The Indian polity of today seems to be undergoing a historically unprecedented process: the irresistible rise of the extreme right to dominance in vast areas of culture, society, ideology and economy, albeit with commitment to observe virtually all the institutional norms of liberal democracy. It is moving to capture total state power not through frontal seizure—as was once customary for revolutions of the left as well as the right—but through patiently engineered and legally legitimate takeover of the liberal institutions by its personnel from within, while keeping the institutions intact.

We shall come to some factual details shortly. Suffice it to say here that a power bloc has undoubtedly become dominant in India in whose ideology a religio-cultural definition of nationhood functions very much the way theories of race used to function in the Nazi ideology; and that the powerful backing in word and deed that Narendra Modi, the present prime minister, received during his bid for power by virtually the whole of the corporate apex, does remind one of Mussolini's famous definition of fascism as a form of state in which government and corporations become one. The question of fascism in this context will be addressed briefly in a later section of this essay. It is worth

remarking, though, that unlike all the interwar ideologies of the European irrationalist, extreme right—whether Nazi or fascist or merely militarist and unlike their Islamist counterparts—the Hindutva extreme right has fashioned no comparable discourse of rejection of or contempt for liberal democracy as such. The phrase 'extreme right' here does not apply to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the current ruling party. The BJP functions as a political party but is, in its essence, a right-wing front of the extreme right that is represented primarily by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Instead they train hundreds of thousands of their cadres to build a well-oiled, invincible electoral machine for contest at the polls. They do propose many significant changes in the Indian constitution. However, there is no rhetoric against constitutional, liberal democratic form as such, in contrast even to the Indian communist left which ritually criticises 'bourgeois democracy' while participating, indeed, giving most of its energy to participating in all its rituals and procedures. This unconditional public commitment to liberal democratic norms contrasts sharply, however, with the self organisation of Hindutva's central organ itself, as we shall see below. In practice, this commitment to liberal democratic form is most pronounced in the arena of electoral politics. In the social life of the country, though, organised mob violence is utilised routinely but always presented as a response to

misconduct by the Muslim and/or Christian minorities. Whether this absence of open opposition to liberal constitutionality is an abiding commitment or a pragmatic decision open to repudiation at a later stage remains unclear.

The intricate, multi-layered networks of this extreme right are spearheaded in today's India by the RSS and, secondarily, by its political front, the BJP, while the RSS also commands, quite literally, thousands of fronts across the country, for every conceivable social category in Indian society, whether defined by caste or profession or language or region or whatever. This organisational form highly centralised in its fundamentals, multi-faceted and flexibly organised in others, responds strategically to the fact that India is by far the most heterogeneous society in the world and welding it all together into a single hegemonic political project would take an enormous act of imagination and organisation that would have to be sustained over an unpredictably long period of time. The objective is not merely to win elections and form governments but to transform Indian society in all domains of culture, religion and civilisation. Acquisition of political power is seen as a means toward that end.

The RSS was founded ninety years ago, in 1925, on an uncannily Gramscian principle that enduring political power can arise only on the basis of a prior cultural transformation and consent, and this broad based

cultural consent to the extreme right's doctrines can only be built through a long historical process, from the bottom up. What follows from this ideological articulation of the long-term strategy is that if the RSS succeeds in constituting a certain sort of social subjectivity for the great majority of Hindus in India who are said to constitute some 80 per cent of the Indian population (we shall come later to this claim) and if they can all be unified, positively, in pursuit of a civilisational mission, and, negatively, in permanent opposition to a fancied enemy (Muslim and Christian minorities in the countries), as the Nazis sought to unite the German nation against the Jews, then the demographic majority can be turned into a permanent political majority. In that case, what the left might designate as the extreme right could rule comfortably through the institutions of liberal democracy in India that have already adjusted themselves to low-intensity but punctual use of violence against religious minorities.

There is no analogue for this particular structure of thinking in the irrationalist authoritarianisms in the Euro-American zones during the interwar years or after. The only approximate example I can think of is that of certain, not by any means all, but some strands in the Islamist political right. The idea is, in essentials, the same: secure religio-cultural ideological dominance first, taking advantage of the fact that liberal institutions do not necessarily obstruct the power of the extreme right. And build enduring political power over time by combining religio-cultural conservatism and majoritarian violence with neoliberal capitalism within the belly of imperialism, as well as

liberal democratic institutions of governance domestically.

II

We can pick up the story with the general elections of 2014 and then trace it backwards. For those elections were in significant respects unique but their true significance can emerge only if we understand their context, not just immediate political context but their place in the larger historical process. The victorious party, the BJP, is not a normal right-wing party, like the British Tories or even the US Republicans. Its uniqueness in the general configuration of right-wing parties in the world is that it is not an independent party at all but only a mass political front of a seasoned and semi-secret organisation, the RSS, which describes itself as "cultural" and "non-political" but whose declared intention is to altogether transform India's political, social, religious life, from the bottom up, and which has at its disposal, if we take into account all the front organisation it has spawned, what is easily the largest political force in the world of liberal democracies. And it has displayed a remarkable degree of what one can only call Olympian patience. It has pursued its objectives single-mindedly for ninety years and is still in no hurry.

From that standpoint, victory in one election is just one episode among others. Let us look at this episode and then assemble the necessary fragments of a deeper analysis.

In 2014, the BJP swept to power with a complete majority, winning 282 seats, up from 116 in the outgoing parliament and ten more than required to form a government all on its own. It had gone into the

elections as part of an alliance of diverse political parties, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), and chose to form a coalition government with insignificant partners that it does not need.

An interesting feature of the new parliament was that the average asset value of individual members of parliament has risen to \$2.3 million, almost three times as much as was the case in the previous parliament (\$850,000). In a country where the majority lives on less than \$2 dollars a day, this is overwhelmingly a parliament of the rich.

Central to this configuration, as symbol and as chief actor, is the unique figure of the current prime minister, Narendra Modi. At least three aspects of this phenomenon can be isolated at this point. As the main accused in the pogrom-like ethnic cleansing of Muslims in Gujarat during 2002 when he was chief minister there, Modi is the most aggressive symbol of the extremist ethno-religious violence in India.

The second major aspect of Modi's irresistible rise to power has been the fact that never in the country's history has the fraternity of leading corporate CEOs united so strongly and volubly to promote a single politician to prime ministership as they did for Modi. Gujarat is the most industrialised state in India (and Gujarat's poor among its most wretched), and the magnates of Gujarati capital are deeply connected with their counterparts in Bombay, India's financial hub and home to some its leading industrialists, as well as with capitalists of Indian origin living in the UK, US and elsewhere. As chief minister of Gujarat for a decade and a half, Modi did as much as

he could to turn the state into a fief for crony capitalists, from inside Gujarat and elsewhere, eventually receiving enormous financial and other kinds of support from them. This helped greatly in transforming his image in the corporate media, electronic and print alike, from that of a bloodthirsty extremist to that of an economic genius who had single-handedly led the state of Gujarat from rags to riches, a veritable Development Man (Vikaas Purush in Hindi) whose firm and visionary leadership India needed in this decisive moment of opportunity on the global stage.

This corporate support also helped him spend on his electoral campaign roughly the same amount as Obama had spent on his, while not a fraction of it was available to his opponents. With such resources Modi's campaign went presidential on the model of the US electoral system; it all became an affair of electing one unique man, in what was until then a very different campaign style, more in keeping with the parliamentary system.

The third truly notable aspect of Modi's rise to power is that this is the first time that a man who had spent most of his adult life as a fulltime organiser/preacher (pracharak) in the shadowy wings of the RSS, a semi-secret organisation to start with, has become the country's chief executive. A.B. Vajpayee, who headed a previous government of the BJP, was also a member of the RSS, as are virtually all the key leaders of the BJP. However, Vajpayee and others of his kind were mere members while they led other public or professional lives and went into politics early in their youth to become part of the rough and tumble of parliamentary life. Not so Modi.

We know that he joined the RSS as an adolescent but we know little else about the first thirty years or so of his life; and what we know comes only from him. By the time he came fully into public view, as an RSS organiser in and out of BJP offices, he was close to forty. When he was parachuted into Gujarat as chief minister, on RSS direction, he had had no career in electoral politics. He has become prime minister without any prior experience in parliament. His closest crony in the national capital, Amit Shah, is his closest crony from Gujarat, a sinister fellow generally credited with many a murder.

Who does Modi represent ? The simple answer is: the RSS and the corporate elite. But he is also filled to the brim with immense, megalomaniac self-love. Who will serve whom is yet to be seen.

III

What, then, about the "Long March" of the RSS ? We will first address issues related its original formation and ideological articulations, followed by comment on its organisational innovations in the next section.

At the broadest level, the RSS arose in 1925 as part of a wider proliferation of such organisations across many countries during the interwar years, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, that were part of a global offensive of the right in response to the Bolshevik Revolution, as well as a wider upsurge in workers' movements and communist parties. We don't have space here to trace the fascinating parallels between the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Indian RSS. Both subscribed to variants of religious majoritarianism

and religio-cultural revivalism. Both found the Nazi ideology deeply attractive for its definition of nationalism in terms of race and religion, in opposition to the definition of nationhood descended from the French Revolution and based on the idea of equal citizenship for all regardless of race, religion, etc. Some of the leaders of Hindu nationalism said openly that the German "solution" for the Jews could be fruitfully applied to Indian Muslims. From Mussolini, they learned the political uses of the golden classical past; and from Nazis and fascists alike, they learned the strategic uses of force, violence, militias and spectacular public rituals in the creation of a new, hysterical kind of political will. And they imbibed the cult of the leader, a politics of mass obedience as well as contempt for the democratic form in their own organisation.

The career of the RSS is remarkable in this regard: it reserves the classically Nazi organisational form of extreme centralised authoritarianism for itself, uses a variety of other fronts for exercise of violence and defiance of constitutionality whenever it so desires, even as it allows and organises obedience to constitutional norms for its political front, the BJP, the currently ruling party of India. There are moments when the BJP itself deviates from legality but, once the fruits of deviation have been reaped, it is brought back to the norm. In playing this game of a central cadre-based formation answerable to none, a political front that functions very much like a normal party in the Indian liberal-democratic milieu, and a plethora of other fronts that function at various levels of legality and illegality, the

RSS has honed the "good cop, bad cop" technique to sinister perfection. We shall return to this point.

The RSS arose not as a unique expression of what came to be known as "Hindu nationalism" (as contrasted to the canonical "secular nationalism" of Gandhi, Nehru, etc.), but as one of many. Founded in 1913, some twelve years before the RSS, the Hindu Mahasabha remained by far the larger organisation of that kind well into the 1950s when it began to decay and many of its members got assimilated into the RSS and its affiliates. Ironically, the Mahasabha continued to function from inside the professedly "secular" Indian National Congress until 1938; and after Independence, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, one of its illustrious leaders, resurfaced as a minister in the cabinet of none other than Nehru himself. Certain strands of Hindu extremism and conservatism were thus not entirely alien to what I have called India's canonical nationalism and which never tires of asserting its purportedly pristine secularism.

In its original formation, leaders of the RSS had hardly any ideology of their own and borrowed most of their beliefs from V.D. Savarkar, a fascinating and rather enigmatic character, certainly fascistoid in his thinking but also a one-time anti-colonial nationalist who had fallen out with Gandhi on the question of the legitimacy of violence and was inspired, rather, by methods of the "revolutionary terrorists" of Bengal. Even though he published *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*, pretty much the Bible of the Hindu right, in 1923, just two years before the RSS was founded, and then lived on until 1966, Savarkar never in fact joined the RSS and preferred to take over

the presidency of the Mahasabha before gradually withdrawing from politics altogether. Overlaps and alignments were, however, so close that while the RSS was banned in response to Gandhi's assassination, Savarkar was tried in court for involvement in that conspiracy; it so happens that Savarkar was acquitted and the ban on RSS was lifted quite soon. Founders and early leaders of the RSS, Hedgewar and Golwalker in particular, borrowed and reframed his idea for their own organisation, and it is only after the RSS emerged as the united church of Hindu nationalism, from the 1960s onward, that Savarkar came to be seen increasingly as its own chief ideologue. Parenthetically, we should note that even today the RSS is by far the most important organisation of the Hindu right but by no means has any exclusive monopoly of it. There are many outside its own umbrella (or family—*parivar*—as its fronts like to be called). The most notable is the Shiv Sena, but countless small groups of the most violent sort keep cropping up all the time, and it is not always possible to know which of them are covertly RSS outfits and which are not.

Hindu nationalist ideology during its formative phase inherited from the British a colonialist reading of India's history, already canonised by James Mill in his iconic six-volume *The History of British India* that started appearing in 1817. This delineated Indian history as comprising three historical periods: that of the Hindu Golden Age; that of the defeat and fall of Hindu civilisation at the hands of Muslim tyranny; and the then-dawning phase for which the British were represented as liberators of Hindus from that tyranny. The

latter element accounts for the great ambivalence of Hindu nationalism toward colonialism and imperialism. When *Hindutva* ideologues speak of the Hindus having suffered under "foreign rule", they routinely refer to the period of the Muslim dynasties, not to the British. And although they would like to claim some anti-colonial lineage, there is scant evidence of their actually having participated much in those struggles. Thanks to these powerful ideological legacies, their nationalism of today is remarkably devoid of any anti-imperialist positions and, thanks to the neoliberal consensus, devoid even of the sort of ideologies of self-reliance that Gandhian / Nehruvian variant of nationalism had envisioned for the development of Indian capitalism.

While the leaders of the Congress declared themselves "secular" with varying degrees of commitment or conviction, by the same token, the hostility of Hindu nationalism to this "secular" nationalism was boundless. Savarkar, the chief ideologue in the whole spectrum of Hindu nationalism, drew a sharp and enduring distinction: Gandhi's was a "territorial nationalism" which debased the idea of the nation by associating it with mere territory, whereas his own was a "cultural nationalism" of the "Hindu Race" for which culture was synonymous with the whole way of Hindu life, including politics, society, civilisational heritage, family structures, form of government, etc. a primordial, all-encompassing Being of the "Race", as it were.

IV

For the first quarter century of its existence the RSS displayed no tendency toward innovation and

concentrated on self-preservation and expansion, with the distinct novelty that it concentrated on recruiting as many young boys into its local branches (shakhas) as possible, in keeping with the view that cultural transformation can be deep-rooted only if a corps of cadres are indoctrinated into its protocols from an early age. Strikingly, it stipulates that any boy who comes to its shakha must do so with the prior consent and daily knowledge of elders in his family, assuming that there are countless families in the country who would welcome such an opportunity for their son and who will then get directly involved in the social life of the organisation. During this first phase, the RSS seems to have wanted to shelter itself under state patronage, while it carried out its more or less clandestine work under the banner of "culture". It repeatedly proposed mutual cooperation with the British colonial authorities in opposition to the Congress and the communists. Soon after Independence, and even after it was briefly banned following Gandhi's assassination, it proposed cooperation with the Congress against the communists who had emerged fleetingly as the main opposition in parliament.

It floated its first front organisation under duress for women, in 1936 to protect its own all-male character and to ward off pressure from some particularly enthusiastic and vocal women who wanted membership to be offered to women as well. No membership in the masculinist fraternity, the RSS declared, but you can have an organisation (a Samiti) for yourself under our guidance. Then a lukewarm attempt was made in 1948–49 to float a students' front during the period when the

RSS itself had been banned, but that attempt went nowhere and the students' front got going seriously only a decade later. Today, that front plausibly claims to be the largest students' organisation in the country.

The real turning point came in 1951, on the eve of the first general elections, when a political front was floated in the shape of a brand new political party to participate in the polls, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), which was then dissolved in 1977 to be immediately reincarnated as the BJP. The BJS won three seats in 1951 but as many as 35 seats in 1967, with 9.41 per cent of the vote, having united much of the Hindu right under its umbrella by then. But the majority of the Indian capitalists continued to support the Congress, at times grumbling and sullen, and the minority of investors and traders who did not support it worked through other parties such as the short-lived Swatantra Party. The RSS itself did not grow much between Gandhi's assassination in 1948 and Nehru's death in 1962; the aura of the Congress as the unrivalled leading light of the anti-colonial movement still held. After that the RSS grew steadily and at times rapidly, even though some of the aura around the Congress lasted through the Indira Gandhi years and collapsed only after she had abrogated civil rights and declared a State of Emergency in the country in 1975.

Other fronts followed thereafter. The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) for the working class, floated in 1955, has, by now, become the single largest central trade union organisation in India, claiming a membership of over ten million workers and affiliation of over four thousand trade unions. The Vishva

Hindu Parishad (VHP) came in 1964, with the purported aim of propagating Hindu culture abroad, and remained in the shadows for two decades when, in 1984, this particular front was selected to spearhead the vast machinery of violence and rabid ideological hysteria that rolled across the country over the next decade and which brought the BJP to power in Delhi, for 13 days in 1996 and then, at the head of a broad based coalition of political parties, for six consecutive years from 1998 to 2004. BJP leaders have asserted time and again that its ability to rise from an isolated minority fringe in 1984 to secure governmental power by 1998 was owed very significantly to the mass mobilisations and the periodic pogroms that reached a particular intensity between 1989 and 1992, culminating in the spectacular destruction of the Babri Masjid, that the Supreme Court had sought to protect through agencies of the Indian government. The reaping of such rich electoral dividends from years of violence by the RSS and its affiliates, and the fact that so many large and influential political parties have joined the coalition led by the BJP means that something very fundamental has changed in the very fabric of the Republic.

It was during those two years that Modi, the current prime minister, saw what was there for all to see: that communal killings, images of Hindus killing members of Christian and Muslim minorities, are good for winning elections. Since staging his own ethnic cleansing in 2002 he has not looked back. He increased his majority in the state assembly by a solid 10 per cent in the aftermath of those killings, won two more state assembly elections, and then led his party to spectacular victory in the

recent national elections. The RSS plays its fronts like pawns on the chessboard of Indian politics, mixing legality and illegality, electoral politics and machineries of violence, in full view of agencies of law and organs of civil society. This is rather a sinister variant on the famous formula: "hegemony = consent + coercion". And coercion has had and will continue to have a specific form: small doses, steadily dispensed; no gas ovens, just a handful of storm troopers, here and there, appearing and disappearing; and a permanent fear that corrodes the souls of the wretched of the land, while the liberal democratic machinery rolls on without any formal suspension of civil liberties!

That, then, is the first innovation; a large inventory of very different kinds of fronts, to perform very different kinds of functions, at different times and in different spheres of society, to see if violence that is required for a revolution (from the extreme right) can be practiced alongside the pursuit of legitimacy through parliamentary elections as capitalist legality and subjectivity require. Second is the issue of the relationship between political parties and affiliated organisations (fronts, in common parlance). It is normal in India for large political parties to have fronts for different sections of society: women, students, workers, peasants and so on. The Congress has them, as do the parliamentary communists. By contrast, the innovation here is that the RSS, which floats and controls the fronts, is not a political party but intervenes comprehensively in all aspects of political and social life without taking any responsibility for what it does through its fronts; that the political party, the BJP, is not, strictly

speaking, a political party but only a front in which virtually all the key leaders and organisers are drawn from the RSS. Moreover, all the other fronts are also fronts of the RSS, an extra-parliamentary entity; the BJP, being a front itself, has no control over those fronts. Fourth innovation: none of it is secret, as all is public and comprehensively documented, time and again just a normal part of liberal democratic freedom. Fifth, intricacies of law and constitution are carefully sifted through to determine exactly to what extent the RSS itself can function in the public domain as a legally constituted entity without having to reveal much of what it is and what it does. As a self-styled "cultural" organisation it is exempt from the kind of accountability that is required of political parties. Liberal protections are thus utilised for secretive authoritarian purpose. In all this there are two distinct claims which the RSS throws around as if they were identical. It emphatically claims to be a purely "cultural" organisation, uninvolved in politics and, therefore, exempt from requirements imposed on political parties, such as revealing its membership or keeping accounts for public scrutiny. Simultaneously, it claims that it has a right to guide in all aspects of politics because, far from being an autonomous sphere, politics in Hindu society is one area of "culture", just as "culture" itself is an all-encompassing expression of the religion of the Race. The two claims are of course incompatible. Not for nothing did Mussolini declare that "we fascists are super-relativists".

And the final, most far-reaching innovation: the sheer number of fronts, running surely into the

hundreds, possibly thousands—no one knows. The Anthropological Survey of India holds that the Indian population is comprised of thousands of distinct communities, sociologically so defined by custom, speech, location, cuisine, spiritual belief, caste, sub-caste, occupation, what have you. The RSS is the only organisation in India which has the ambition to have fronts for as many of these diversities as possible and does indeed go on creating more and more of them. In this sense, it is a spectacular missionary organisation, and the mission is religious, cultural, social, economic, educational and of course political. The heart of this problem for the RSS is that even though the word "Hindu" is used by all as if the word referred to some homogeneous religious community or a unified social category, the reality is that all these diversities—even immense differences of custom and religious belief—exist among precisely the 80 per cent of the Indians who are considered "Hindu". Contrary to this reality, the RSS has fairly precise ideas of what it means to be a Hindu, based on its own doctrine that being a Hindu is not merely a religious category, divorced from other kinds of subjectivity or conduct, but an entire way of life, from cradle to grave. It wants to make sure that the ideal type it has invented becomes the normative standard among that 80 per cent. Its commitment to creating a cultural homogeneity out of this ocean of diversities, and to translate that cultural homogeneity into a unified political will, means that it wishes to become both church and state simultaneously. That ambition is at the heart of its fight against secular civility and the specific content of its authoritarianism. That

so comprehensive a civilisational project would wholly succeed appears implausible. The undertaking is audacious, however, and the success so far, although partial, is also undeniably impressive.

V

India's post-Independence history can be broadly conceptualised in terms of three phases. The first lasted from 1947 to 1975. It was premised on four values of the Nehruvian paradigm: secularism, democracy, socialism, non-alignment. The practice did not always correspond to precepts, and the paradigm kept fraying, especially after the India-China War of 1962, and Nehru's death soon thereafter. Even so, a certain degree of liberal-left hegemony did survive and got eroded only gradually. Eventually, the accumulating crises came to a head with the outbreak of massive populist agitation in the mid-1970s and, in response, Indira Gandhi's suspension of civil liberties and Declaration of Emergency.

The end of the first phase and the beginning of the second coincide in the massive ambiguities of that movement famously led by Jayaprakash Narayan (JP), who now forged a far-reaching alliance with the RSS and gathered a whole range of rightist forces as well as youth groups under the slogan of 'Total Revolution', calling upon state apparatuses, including the security agencies, to mutiny. The RSS, with its thousands of cadres, provided the backbone of the anti-Emergency movement and then of the Janata Party government that arose out of the end of the Emergency, when Bharatiya Jana Sangh's share of parliamentary seats rose from 35 in 1967 to 94 in 1977,

with Vajpayee and Advani, veterans of the RSS, rising to occupy key cabinet posts. That outcome of the anti-Emergency agitation leading to the first non-Congress government in the country is still celebrated in the (non-Congress) liberal circles as a moment when the sturdiness of Indian democracy prevailed over Indira Gandhi's dictatorial tendencies. Yet that was precisely the process that served to legitimise the RSS as a respectable force in Indian politics and to confer on its political front a significant place in government for the first time in Indian history. I might add that the RSS made exponential strides between 1977 and 1982, for five years after the Emergency was lifted, owing to its newfound reputation as a defender of democracy against dictatorship.

On the whole, though, that force also got splintered owing to its own contradictions and the phase of relative political crisis of the capitalist state in India continued, in which the older power bloc, led by the Congress, was no longer capable of stable rule but none other had emerged to replace it either.

Momentous changes took place both nationally and internationally in the late 1980s-early 1990s (1989 to 1992, to be more precise). Those years witnessed the historic collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and in southeastern Europe more generally, with the US becoming an unrivalled global hegemon. The whole of the Indian ruling class and its state structures could now openly unite behind this "lone superpower" with no internal friction at all. Inside the country, those same years witnessed the onset of the neoliberal regime with the so-called Rao-Manmohan reforms. These years also

inaugurated a decisive turn in the institutionalisation of communalism in structures of the Indian state, which began with the tacit agreement between the Congress and the VHP at the time of Shila Nyas in 1989 and even more dramatically during the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992. Conditions remained highly unstable for a few years, however.

By 1998 neoliberalism had become a consensual position among the propertied classes and their representatives in various spheres of the national life. At the same time, the far right had made rapid gains and began concentrating on consolidation of its newfound power. Extreme violence of the early 1990s was no longer required. It was much more important now to give the BJP a mildly liberal face so that it could be accepted as a party of capitalist rule and an alternative to the Congress. The coalition government it formed in 1998 lasted for six years, leading then to ten years of a Congress-led government that only ended with the return of the BJP in 2014 with a firm majority in parliament. Remarkably, these changes in government have witnessed no appreciable changes in policy. In this sense India has become a mature liberal democracy in the neoliberal age, like the US and UK, where the two main competing parties or coalitions of parties function as mere factions in a managing committee of the capitalist classes as a whole. At the heart of this new consensus in the Indian ruling class is close alliance with imperialism externally, and the imposition of neoliberal order domestically.

Not that the punctual uses of violence as a strategic imperative have declined. Killing of some members of the religious minorities is a common affair, a couple of

Christians here, five or ten Muslims there; nothing spectacular, just low-intensity and routinised, nothing to disturb the image of a liberal, secular, deeply democratic India. There is no longer a significant political party in the country, with the exception of the communist left, that has not colluded with the BJP at one point or another since 1996 and especially so since 1998. At the time of the ethnic cleansing of Gujarat in 2002 numerous political parties united to prevent even a discussion of it on the floor of the House. Even the Congress colludes when necessary but rather quietly, not overtly because it is, after all, the main electoral adversary. Increasing communalisation of popular consciousness can now proceed from two sides. There is of course the mass work by the RSS and its affiliates which have gained more and more adherents over some eighty years, in what Gramsci called the quotidian, molecular movements in the quality of mass perceptions at the very base of society the creation of a "new common sense". A majority of the liberals no longer know how much they themselves have moved toward the communal, neoliberal right. And now, for many years, these same shifts can also come from the side of the state, its political parties, educational enterprises, repressive apparatuses, often even the judicial branch. As India increasingly becomes a national security state, the bases for an aggressive, masculinist right-wing nationalism are bound to go deeper into society at large.

VI

Where, then, does the question of fascism fit into all this? I must confess that, in the wake of the

spectacular events of 1992, this author was the first to raise this question comprehensively, first in a lengthy lecture delivered in Calcutta and then in another equally lengthy lecture delivered in Hyderabad. Several other prominent scholars, Sumit Sarkar and Prabhat Patnaik in particular, had expressed similar misgivings. There emerged on the left a broadly shared thinking that the RSS, its affiliates and allies had been distinctly influenced by the Nazi/fascist combine at the very moment of their origin, that they had carried many of those sympathies and principles into their own organisations and modes of conduct, and that many of their more recent strategies and practices were distinctly fascistic. The CPI(M), a political party caught up in debates ranging all around it, even adopted the term "communal fascism" to stress a certain degree of fascist content as well as to specify the uniquely Indian twist to that content. I had further argued that the type of politics that we broadly (and sometimes imprecisely) call "fascism" is a feature of the whole of the imperialist epoch. Not for nothing did French "Integral Nationalism", sometimes credited as being the original form of fascism, arise in precisely those closing decades of the nineteenth century, which were, in Lenin's typology, the original moment for the rise of what he called "imperialism".

In short, so long as one was not suggesting that the replication of the German and Italian experiences was at hand, it was perfectly legitimate to place the RSS into a certain typology of political forces that are fairly widespread even inside contemporary Europe itself, from Greece to France and from Austria

to Ukraine. I had also argued, tongue in cheek, that "every country gets the fascism it deserves" in accordance with the "physiognomy" (a favourite metaphor of Gramsci) of its history, society and politics; and, I would now add, the historical phase that the country is going through. In other words, what we have to grasp about every successful movement of the fascist type is not its replication of something else in the past, but its originality in response to the conditions in which it arises. There is no getting away from the materiality of the "here and now". All revivalism is a contemporary rewriting of the past, a radically modern neo-traditionalism. All the contemporary parties of the fascist type respond to their own national milieux and to the broader fact that, with few and only relative exceptions, the working classes are supine globally, beaten back by neoliberal successes in the reorganisation of capital, and that political liberalism has itself made its peace with this extreme capitalism.

In this situation the proper stance is not: watch out, Nazis are coming. The real question is the one that Kalecki posed at the time of Goldwater's bid for the US presidency in the 1960s: what would fascism look like if it came to a democratic industrial country that had no powerful working-class movement to oppose it? That is the general question, and I think it applies with particular force to the India of today: the far right need not abolish the outer shell of the liberal democratic institutions because these institutions can be taken over by its own personnel altogether peacefully and because most others are quite willing to go along with it so long as acts of large-scale violence

remain only sporadic and the more frequent low-intensity violence can be kept out of general view, by media monopoly combined with mutual agreement between liberalism and the far right. Meanwhile, the communists are now too small a force

to be considered even for a ban. Of course, the question of fascism of the classical type may well resurface if a powerful socialist movement were to be re-founded, on whatever new premises and strategic perspectives that may now be necessary for that

act of re-founding and reconstruction.

(Aijaz Ahmad is a renowned political and literary theorist, and is presently professor at University of California, Irvine. He had earlier taught at Jamia Millia University and JNU.)

Why is the Country Which was Agitated on Martyrdom of Soldiers, Silent on Saints Dying for Ganga?

Sandeep Pandey

In 2011, Swami Nigmanand died on the 115th day of his fast against illegal mining in Haridwar. Matri Sadan, the ashram with which he was associated alleges that he was killed by poisoning in the hospital at the behest of a mining mafia. Swami Gokulanand, who sat on the first fast organised by Matri Sadan along with Swami Nigmanand in 1998, was murdered in 2003 in Nainital by mining mafia. In 2014, Baba Nagnath died on 114th day of his fast for conservation of Ganga in Varanasi. Last year Swami Gyan Swaroop Sanand, earlier known as Professor Guru Das Agrawal at Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur and who served as the founding member-Secretary of Central Pollution Control Board, died on 11th October, on the 112th day of his sixth fast. Sant Gopal Das, who also started his fast for conservation of Ganga on 24th June, 2018 has been missing since 6th December from Dehradun. 26-year-old Brahmachari Atmabodhanand of Kerala, with a resolve to continue the struggle of Swami Sanand, started his fast on 24th October at the same place where Swami Sanand had fasted. He has now completed more than 135 days of fast. Swami Punyanand,

also of Matri Sadan, has given up food grains and is on fruit diet, ready to go on fast if anything happens to Brahmachari Atmabodhanand.

Brahmachari Atmabodhanand went to the Ardha Kumbh in Prayagraj during his fast for about twenty days with his mentor Swami Shivanand but no government representative thought it fit to meet him. The Uttar Pradesh cabinet meeting took place there, senior ruling party leaders including the Chief Minister went there, but nobody had the time for Brahmachari Atmabodhanand. Meanwhile, the government got the water of Ganga cleaned artificially between 15th January and 4th March, 2019, the period of Ardha Kumbh. Clearly, it was only done for political mileage.

Professor G.D. Agrawal had been demanding an uninterrupted flow and a clean Ganga. He wanted all ongoing and proposed hydroelectric power projects on Ganga to be scrapped and all illegal mining to be halted. After his martyrdom, when the government enquired from Swami Shivanand, the head of Matri Sadan who is leading the struggle of saints and has taken a personal resolve to stake the lives of saints of his ashram one after another, including his own

life, as to what was the 'bottomline' of his demands, he replied that three hydroelectric projects, Singauli Bhatwadi on Mandakini, Tapowan Vishnugad and Vishnugad Pipalkoti on Alaknanda and mining in Ganga must be stopped. Scientists believe that Ganga will not be clean unless a minimum volume of flow is ensured in the river. Dams obstruct this flow.

When soldiers are martyred there is widespread emotional outburst throughout the country. People come out on streets, offer help to families of deceased soldiers or erect their statues. The government has little control over the fate of soldiers. However, it can prevent the martyrdom of saints. Why is the Narendra Modi government not willing to dialogue with these saints? Even the common people seem to be insensitive towards these saints. Especially when the idea of nationalism is being given a religious colour.

People take a public stand on the issue of construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya and for preventing the entry of women in Sabrimala temple of Kerala, which includes the two national parties Bhartiya Janata Party and Congress, but do not sympathise with saints who stake their lives for

Ganga.

It is obvious that the BJP, which came to power on the agenda of Hindutva, whose Prime Ministerial candidate declared that he got a call from mother Ganga before contesting election from Varanasi, and the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, which doesn't leave any opportunity to exploit people's religious sentiments, is actually not concerned about cleaning Ganga. Forty percent of the population of the country, which lives next to the Ganga or one of its tributaries, stands to directly benefit from clean Ganga whereas it is unclear who'll benefit from Ram temple in Ayodhya; yet

RSS-BJP are silent on the issue of fasting saints. This demonstrates that politics of Hindutva is not interested in religious issues unless there is a potential for polarisation of votes in its favour. Hence, for the RSS-BJP, it is not the people but merely political power that matters.

Also, the difference between Hindutva and Hinduism has emerged more clearly because of this. Whereas people believing in Hindutva ideology are not averse to taking lives of others, for example in communal riots, lynching in the name of protection of cows, assassination of intellectuals, etc., saints who truly believe in the

philosophy of Hinduism will stake their own lives instead. Moreover, the saints willing to give up their lives are in favour of uninterrupted flow of rivers, whereas those who condone deaths in the name of politics of Hindutva are interested in damming rivers and stopping rivers going to Pakistan, not realising the consequences, either of their politics or of tampering with rivers. This may explain the indifference of RSS-BJP towards fasting saints.

A foot march has been organised by some people's organisations in support of fasting saints who stake their lives for Ganga from Delhi to Haridwar from 9 to 17 March, 2019.

Mahatma Gandhi and Congress on Bhagat Singh's Martyrdom

Saurav Kumar Rai

There are several 'myths' pertaining to modern Indian history and India's struggle for independence. While some of these myths were created by the colonial state itself to weaken the ongoing independence movement, some of them were constructed out of vested political interests in post-independence India. One such powerful myth is regarding Mahatma Gandhi's alleged silence on martyrdom of Bhagat Singh and comrades. It should be noted that Bhagat Singh and two of his associates Shivaram Rajguru and Sukhdev Thapar were sentenced to death by the colonial state in the Lahore conspiracy case and were hanged on 23 March 1931. Now, it is often alleged that Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress could have possibly averted this execution. At the same time, the silence of prominent Congress

leaders following the death of Bhagat Singh is often cited as a glaring example of Congress's insecurity towards the soaring popularity of Bhagat Singh and his associates. Thus, a binary of Mahatma Gandhi / Congress vs. Bhagat Singh / Revolutionaries has been created over a period of time, the resonance of which can often be heard in various discussions and debates in the public sphere.

However, careful dissection of this alleged 'silence' gives some interesting insights on the whole issue. It should be remembered that the execution of Bhagat Singh and his comrades took place around the same period when the Gandhi-Irwin settlement was in force. Consequent on the conversations that took place between the Viceroy Lord Irwin and Mahatma Gandhi, the Congress agreed to temporarily suspend the ongoing Civil Disobedience

Movement and to participate in the Second Round Table Conference. Subsequent to this, instructions were issued for the guidance of all Congressmen so that there should be no complaint of breach of understanding arrived at between the Congress and the Government. One such instruction stated, 'If any lawful orders are passed, right or wrong, they should not be disobeyed.' Further, 'During the period of truce, [our] speeches should not be an attack on Government. There is now no necessity to show past misdeeds of misgovernment.' Moreover, it was instructed that 'we should not make any approving references to acts of violence; congratulation of bravery and self-sacrifice on the part of persons committing acts of violence are unnecessary and misleading, except when made by persons pledged to non-violence in thought and deed as Gandhiji.' These

instructions explain the unusual silence of prominent Congress leaders over the execution of Bhagat Singh which was ‘a lawful order’ passed by the competent judicial authority. At the same time, bound by the instructions to prevent any breach of understanding, they could not openly criticise the Government for its unforeseen haste in this matter nor could they celebrate the heroics of Bhagat Singh.

Nonetheless, it was not that nobody spoke out against this brutality of the government. In fact, the very person who is charged of feeling insecure because of Bhagat Singh’s popularity and of being guilty of remaining silent in the whole matter, Mahatma Gandhi, spoke on more than one occasion against the hanging of Bhagat Singh and his associates. Mahatma Gandhi, on 23 March 1931, made a final appeal to the Viceroy in the interest of peace to commute the sentence of Bhagat Singh and two others. He emphatically argued that ‘popular opinion rightly or wrongly demands commutation; when there is no principle at stake, it is often a duty to respect it.’ Subsequently, Mahatma Gandhi himself penned a moving yet powerful resolution on Bhagat Singh and comrades adopted by the Indian National Congress on 29 March 1931. The resolution stated as follows:

This Congress, while dissociating itself from and disapproving of political violence in any shape or form, places on record its admiration of the bravery and sacrifice of the late Sardar Bhagat Singh and his comrades Syts. Sukhdev and Rajguru, and mourns with the bereaved families the loss of these lives. The Congress is of opinion that this triple execution is an act of

wanton vengeance and is a deliberate flouting of the unanimous demand of the nation for commutation. This Congress is further of opinion that Government have lost the golden opportunity of promoting goodwill between the two nations, admittedly held to be essential at this juncture, and of winning over to the method of peace the party which, being driven to despair, resorts to political violence.

Thus, contrary to popular myth of ‘unforeseen silence’, Mahatma Gandhi did admire the bravery and sacrifice of revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh. The difference between them was basically over the ‘use of violence’ as a mean to

attain independence. In fact, people today often fail to fathom the depth of the virtues which drove our leaders to struggle for independence. Political opposition and difference of opinions nowhere stripped them of the warmth which they shared among each other at personal level. Hence, binaries such as Gandhi vs Bhagat Singh, Gandhi vs Subhas Chandra Bose, Nehru vs Patel, etc. hardly do justice to the cause for which these towering leaders devoted their lives.

(The author is Senior Research Assistant, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.)

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“The uprising in Sudan is building on decades of protests against the regime”

Pavan Kulkarni

The Sudanese uprising continues to advance with a considerable rise in the number of demonstrations. This is despite the declaration of a state of emergency on February 22, which provided the security forces a freer hand unleash repression, including the use of live ammunition against protesters, baton charges, torture in detention—in the course of which many have died—and mass arrests in an attempt to suppress the demonstrations.

What began as a protest against shortages of essential commodities and rising prices, snowballed into a country-wide uprising with protesters determined to oust president Omar al-Bashir, who has been president for 30 years.

With more and more of his former allies deserting his regime, Bashir imposed the emergency. However, this move has only further intensified the resolve of the protesters.

A crucial role in the broad coalition of forces that are leading the uprising has been played by the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP), a number of whose senior members have been subject to arrests. One such member is the secretary of information bureau, Dr. Fathi Elfad.

The 75-year-old veteran was forced into a car by a group of young masked men while he was on his way to the party office, and driven to the headquarters of the notorious National Intelligence and Security Services. After an interrogation, he was moved to the Shihdi detention center, where he was a prisoner for over a month.

Weeks after his release, People’s Dispatch interviewed him to get a better understanding of the causes, nature and the future course of the uprising.

Peoples Dispatch (PD): It has been widely reported that the Sudanese uprising was triggered by a sharp rise in prices. To what extent has the price rise been a decisive factor? What are the other more systemic grievances mounting among the masses over decades of al-Bashir’s rule?

Fathi Elfad (FE): It is true that to a great extent, what triggered the uprising was the sharp price rise. Incidentally, while I was in detention, I met with a comrade from Atbara, the city where the first demonstration took place. He told me that what sparked that mass protest was the spontaneous slogan raised by a group of workers in the market place when they couldn’t find bread for the second day. They started shouting “bread bread” and all of a sudden, the ten or so protesters turned into hundreds and gradually into thousands. That was December 19. But then, the demonstrations continued for three more days and turned into a mass protest, with a number of marches being held to demand the resignation of the regime. Atbara, the railway city, famous for its working class population, was controlled by the organised masses for three days. Then came the crushing intervention of the security forces. On December 22, the government forces took control again, but by that time,

all the northern cities and towns became centers of mass protest actions, demanding the overthrow of the regime. From thereon, the demonstrations became a country-wide event.

I can safely say that the December 19 actions added to the ongoing protest actions which had engulfed the country since January 2018. So, it was no surprise that it spread so swiftly to all the corners of Sudan. By the time the masses took to the streets in the capital on December 25, the mass actions were recorded in over 70 cities and towns. The demands were the same, the downfall of the regime, and the slogan which rang all over the country was and continues to do so: “Freedom, Peace, Justice, the Revolution is the People’s Choice!”

PD: Mass protests have been more or less a persistent phenomenon throughout the almost 30 years of al-Bashir’s rule. What, in your assessment, are the peculiarities of the contemporary political environment in Sudan?

FE: It is difficult to recall a year during the last 20 years which did not witness a number of protest actions against the dictatorial regime. Suffice it to say that the regime is waging war in the three western regions of the country since 2003. The main change in the situation [this time] is the hard work and efforts by the Sudanese Communist Party to build the broadest possible alliance of political parties, armed groups, mass democratic organisations, professional unions, workers’ and

peasants' movements, as well as students' and women's unions. This hard work resulted in the establishment, by mid-December, of a national coordinating body which is leading the present struggle.

I may also add that the activities of the opposition political parties, including our party, have helped to organise and mobilise the masses, as well as prepare them for confrontation with the regime. Despite the fact that this alliance is still not that strong—with some differences here and there—it is still holding, especially on the ground level. I think it is a great achievement so far, but much work is needed to maintain and develop this unity of action, especially taking into consideration the attempts by imperialist and reactionary forces, both internal and regional, to abort the revolution and impose a compromise solution that would rescue part of the regime and keep the interests of these forces protected.

PD: More and more reports are emerging about deaths and hospitalisation of protesters after being tortured in detention. There have also been reports of doctors and medics being arrested and tortured to death. How widespread is the use of torture by the security forces? What record has the government had with regards to this before the current uprising began?

FE: The use of excessive force and torture has been a common practice of the dictatorial regime since its early days. Following the coup of 1989, the regime established hidden centers known among the opposition as "Ghost Houses". Thousands of political detainees were tortured in these centers. Over a hundred people were tortured to death. Among those who lost

their lives are Dr. Ali Fadl and Abd Almoniem Salaman, both leading cadres of the SCP. Khomeini's Iran took the lead in training the thugs of the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood in torture and other techniques to obtain information.

Torture is being used both in interrogation and as a punitive measure to strike terror among young detainees. It is not only directed against doctors and medics but also against all detainees, especially known activists. Till now, three doctors have lost their lives while treating injured demonstrators in the makeshift centers in the streets, while scores of doctors have been beaten for performing their duties in hospitals. The wrath of the regime is directed against the medical staff because of their traditional role in support of progressive causes.


PD: Apart from the mass arrests and torture by security forces, there are also a large number of reports about masked men attacking protesters. Who are these masked men? What is their method of operation? What is the reason for their existence considering the fact that the security forces have no qualms in using violent force?

FE: This method of using masked men to attack, and shoot to kill, goes back to the September 2013 uprising. During that period, over 200 demonstrators lost their lives. Many court cases are still being pursued, but to no avail. This time, the security forces have learned their lesson—they are trying to cover up their brutal methods. They stage snipers on high buildings from where they can spot and shoot from a distance. The police, as well as the security forces, have denied using live ammunition. But the evidence obtained proves beyond

any doubt that security men, masked and dressed in civilian clothes, are the culprit of such crimes. They belong to a special unit within the security apparatus.

(Pavan Kulkarni is author at People's Dispatch.)

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Appeal to Non-BJP Opposition Parties Regarding 2019 Elections

The coming 2019 may prove to be a watershed in India's political history, as were the 1977 elections forty-two years ago. In 1977, elections were held after a declared Emergency, during which the Constitution was suspended, political activity disallowed and opposition leaders and activists imprisoned. The success of non-Congress parties in those elections strengthened the electoral system in Indian democracy. Since then all ruling parties losing elections have demitted office gracefully, rather than attempting to subvert the popular mandate.

However, since 2014, the Modi government has attacked democracy in more insidious, thoroughgoing and indirect ways. This attack is aimed at weakening the institutional and popular foundations of democracy in India. It should be stressed that the regime has functioned in close proximity with its parent body, the RSS. Its policies are designed in pursuance of the RSS goal of militarising the political culture and creating an atmosphere of perpetual communal conflict. These are some of the elements of this strategy:

1. The Modi regime has devalued constitutional institutions, subverted the separation of powers, and used executive power for sectarian and corrupt purposes. It has diminished the legislative authority of the parliament, hidden information from parliamentary committees, and used it as a platform for political abuse. The use of CBI against political opponents, meddling in its functioning—including subverting its internal structure with the help of hand-picked officials—is one of its

infamous deeds. It has lied to the judiciary, and interfered in judicial appointments with mala-fide intentions. Governors appointed by it in states ruled by opposition parties have acted shamelessly as its agents.

2. The Cabinet system is in shambles, the principle of collective responsibility thrown to the winds. The PMO and a clutch of favoured officials and non-constitutional authorities such as the NSA have usurped the power to make major decisions. This has been exposed most clearly in the Rafale deal.
3. The Modi regime has tried to subvert the federal structure of the Union to concentrate central power. Agencies such as the CBI, NIA, ED have been used opportunistically for this purpose.
4. The Modi regime has shamelessly subverted India's criminal justice system. The use of sedition law and the NSA against students, journalists and activists who question it has become pervasive. Prosecution trials of Hindutva activists accused of terrorist acts have been wrecked from within. Upright officials have been victimised, and even judges threatened discreetly. The file containing evidence on Aseemanand's involvement in the (Malegaon blast case) disappeared. Crucial evidence on the death of Judge Loya and two of his friends was apparently ignored and the case was subject to an indecent burial—the manner in which this was done has brought disrepute to our judiciary.
5. In states like UP, police have unleashed a reign of fake

encounters to eliminate and threaten opposition party workers. In scores of incidents involving public lynching of poor people transporting cows, the so-called cow-vigilantes filmed themselves carrying out these brutal acts, indicating their confidence that they would be protected. In sum, the BJP/RSS regime has openly enabled hooliganism and violence. With what face can it confront Maoist and jihadi violence?

6. The Modi regime has tried to destroy the autonomy of important institutions of governance, which are necessary to maintain impartiality, professionalism and transparency. This became obvious in the case of the RBI, NSSO and CBI. The autonomy of institutions such as the Election Commission, Central Information Commission, etc has been sought to be compromised. Even more sinister is the attempt to drag the military and security organs into their political campaign.
7. The Modi regime has used state power to advance the totalitarian programme of the RSS and its affiliates. Marginalised communities have suffered the most from this policy. Religious minorities have been threatened and attempts made to erode their political representation and constitutionally protected rights. There have been a series of attacks on Dalits who question the caste system; and Adivasis trying to assert their autonomy. It tried to pass a communalised Citizenship Amendment bill which makes a mockery of the secular Constitution, and would have destroyed the delicate fabric

of community relationships in North-East India.

8. The Modi regime has tried to criminalise India's political culture and reduce it to gutter politics. The Prime Minister and BJP President have lied in public rallies and used offensive language against their political opponents. Its armies on social media have systematically circulated rumours and fake claims, and trolled critics of the government with hate messages in foul language including threats of rape and molestation. Organised groups have attacked and threatened ordinary citizens in the name of patriotism.
9. In the aftermath of the Pulwama suicide bombing, RSS fronts (ABVP, VHP, Bajrang Dal) have attacked innocent Kashmiri students and traders in places like Dehra Dun, thus further undermining social integrity, which depends on the impartial rule of law. This propaganda campaign was so poisonous that the CRP command had to run a programme to counter the communal poison being spread on social media by the so-called patriots. Senior retired Armed Forces officers have denounced these attempts at politicising the Services. It is now clear that anyone who differs from the RSS/BJP runs the risk of being attacked as 'anti-national'

All these are taking India towards a totalitarian and violent mass culture, which will be a threat to everyone who do not come out to support the regime. Any successes of BJP in the coming elections will deepen the hollowing out of Indian democracy. All non-BJP political parties, irrespective of their programmes, and regardless of the social groups they represent, will be victims of the implosion of

democracy under BJP/RSS rule.

We appeal to all opposition political parties to realise and confront the gravity of the threat to democracy. It is a time to rise above political competition. Political parties can function only in a democratic institutional structure and popular culture. If Modi, the BJP and the RSS succeed in their plans, our democratic institutions will be destroyed, and political parties will become irrelevant.

Besides an operational and effective electoral understanding, it is essential that parties project a minimum programme to undo the most insidious actions of the Modi regime. This should include the following:

1. The law for electoral bonds passed by the Modi government, allowing anonymous corporate contributions should be scrapped. All contributions to political parties should be transparent.
2. The colonial law on sedition should be scrapped.
3. We need a public commitment to strengthen citizens' rights by not allowing misuse of draconian laws like the NSA, and further strengthen the right to information (RTI). A charter of citizen's rights should be brought out.
4. Strengthen rights-based social welfare programmes like the MNREGA.
5. Laws are needed against social media abuse, particularly ones directed at women, in the light of threats of sexual violence received by many women activists, writers and journalists.

(Petition drafted by People's Alliance for Democracy and Secularism (PADS); endorsed by over 100 intellectuals and activists from all over the country.)

Letter to Editor

Mediation Committee for Ayodhya Dispute

Chandrabhal Tripathi

The move of the Supreme Court to let a mediation effort being made by a three-member committee of negotiators is welcome but already doubts are being expressed about the neutral nature of the mediation committee, openly naming Sri Sri Ravi Shankar of Art of Living fame as an unsuitable member of the committee. The views expressed by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar some time ago on the Ayodhya dispute are well known. How is it that the present CJI Gogoi, who has so far acquitted himself well in matters of transparency, took this decision? The people at large consider Sri Sri Ravi Shankar as representing the Hindutva point of view. One of the two remaining members is an internationally known expert on mediation. The only member left who is also the Chairman of the committee is a retired Judge of the Supreme Court of India. I hope that the Hindutva forces will not treat him as representing the Muslim point of view. That will be the end of the three-member team. The efforts of this team are bound to fail because of the inclusion of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. There are many other Hindu leaders including spiritual leaders whose services could have been requisitioned for this noble cause.

Has anybody cared to ascertain the views and feelings of the local Hindu population? They are definitely against this dispute, a creation of the colonial administration, otherwise a communist could not have been elected from Ayodhya to the State Vidhan Sabha in the recent past. Why is it that the Ram temple movement is organised and led by Hindutva forces from Maharashtra and Gujarat? I don't wish to prolong this submission and leave it to the good sense of my friends to form their own opinion in the national interest. As the General Election 2019 gets nearer and nearer the voice of the rabble rousers is likely to become more deafening but let us not forget that we have a Constitution of India to guide us.

Humanitarian Crisis in America: It's Time for the US to Invade itself

Under the guise of 'humanitarian aid' and the struggle for 'democracy', the United States has justified dozens of military and political interventions in the world during the 20th and 21st centuries. In their most recent campaign they have focused on Venezuela as part of a strategy to undermine progressive governments in the region.

With coordinated media manipulation, economic blockade and diplomatic pressure, the imperialist offensive on the Latin American nation has been going on for more than a decade. They have branded the Venezuelan government a "dictatorship", presenting it as a "failed state" plunged into social chaos, with high rates of poverty, malnutrition, and insecurity; arguing that the cause is the progressive model and not exogenous factors such as international discrediting or blockade.

For the United States, and much of the West, these are sufficient grounds to justify political and diplomatic intervention, which would even be military. But if these are triggers for intervention, it is actually time for the United States to take the initiative to invade its own country—in defense of human rights and democracy of the people of the United States.

The American situation is highly worrying and qualifies the nation to be a suitable recipient of 'humanitarian aid' made in the USA. According to a report by Philip Alston, special rapporteur of the United Nations (UN) on extreme poverty and human rights,

it was revealed that by 2018, 40 million people in the United States live in poverty, 18.5 million live in extreme poverty and more than five million live in conditions of absolute poverty.

The country has the highest youth poverty rate in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the highest infant mortality rate among comparable states in this group. Not surprisingly, Alston described the country as the most unequal society in the developed world.

No wonder the United States can no longer be called a "first world" nation. According to a study by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), for the majority of its citizens, approximately 80% of the population, the United States is a nation comparable to the "Third World".

To arrive at this conclusion, economists applied the model of Arthur Lewis, Nobel laureate in economics (1979), which was designed to identify the factors on the basis of which a country could be classified as a developing country.

According to Peter Temin, co-author of the study, America can be called a developing country on the basis of this model: it is a dual economy (a huge gap between a small part of the population that is enormously rich and the vast majority that lives in poverty) in which the poor have little influence over public policy; the rich keeps wages of the working people low so that they can benefit from cheap

labour; societal control is used to prevent the low-wage sector from challenging policies that favour the high-income sector; high rates of incarceration; the tax system is oriented towards keeping taxes on the rich low; and it is a society where social and economic mobility is low.

This is especially relevant when one of the main arguments for aggressions by the USA on other countries is the supposed 'welfare' and human rights of citizens. Americans should first turn their gaze back on themselves.

According to a 11-country analysis of the Commonwealth Fund (2017), the United States, for the sixth consecutive time, had the worst health system amongst the wealthy nations. Despite having the most expensive health care system on the planet, with an annual expenditure of three trillion dollars, its performance is the lowest on measures of health system equity, access, administrative efficiency, care delivery, and health care outcomes.

Meanwhile, life expectancy in the United States declined for the third consecutive year to 78.6 years, the longest sustained decline since 1915–18, when the first world war and the 1918 Spanish influenza pandemic were among the causes of death. In comparison, Cuba, which according to John Bolton (National Security Advisor of the USA) is a part of the 'Troika of Tyranny,' has a life expectancy of 79.74 years (in 2018).

And as regards education, over the years 1990 to 2016, the United States' ranking plummeted from

6 to 27 in the world, making it's education system one of the worst in the 'developed' world. Public spending on education in the US fell between 2010 and 2014 by 4% (per student), while education spending, on average, rose 5% per student across the 35 countries in the OECD.

Falling life expectancy, an expensive and inequitable health system and an education system that is one of the worst among developed nations—if this is not enough justification for the US government and the rest of the West to intervene in the USA, then constant human rights violations must be enough cause for mobilising troops to the border and initiating a military intervention.

The United States has systematically directed or influenced interventions in Latin America and the rest of the global South. It has assigned to itself a 'license to kill' anywhere in the world, as evidenced in the recent covert operations, ethnic wars and military invasions that it has conducted / fuelled in countries around the world.

Prisons where human rights are grossly violated such as Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib are of course well-known examples of the impunity with which the USA violates human rights. People such as Gina Haspel, who was deeply involved in the US government's torture program, have risen to powerful positions such as director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

But the most glaring instance of the contempt the United States has for human rights is its withdrawal from the UN Human Rights Council, an international body charged with ensuring that such violations do not happen. This

decision came days after the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights denounced the Trump administration's practice of forcibly separating migrant children from their parents and imprisoning them in what can only be called modern concentration camps.

Domestically, police accountability for the use of excessive force has declined, especially in black and Latino communities. According to a Boston University study, the systematic killing of black men in the United States by use of excessive force reflects an underlying structural racism in American society, which is also reflected in a biased justice system against black communities. "If the police patrolled the white areas as they do poor black neighborhoods, there would be a revolution," says Paul Butler, author of *Chokehold: Policing Black Men*, which recounts what it means to be a black man in the United States.

Such human rights violations are the daily reality for ethnic minorities and historically discriminated groups. This is coupled with the strengthening of fascist-leaning groups, which have the direct and indirect support of central and local government in several states—a worrying scenario for millions of black, Latino and other ethnic citizens.

Instead of intervening in its own country to resolve these human rights issues and social welfare issues, the US has shown false 'concern' for welfare and human rights in Venezuela, Libya, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan and Ukraine and under that pretext, launched invasions and aggressions on these countries. Behind these illegal

actions are an ulterior motive, that is revealed by another indicator—the US is ranked number one in the world in military spending. As of 2019, the United States has a military budget of over 680 billion dollars, more than the combined military spending of the next seven nations with the largest military budgets: China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, India, France, the United Kingdom and Japan.

The US is not the world leader in economic freedom—it ranks 12th in the Index of Economic Freedom published annually by the Heritage Foundation; nor is it the world leader in GDP growth, where it is ranked 147 out of 224 countries. The United States is a military empire, its economy is based on war, and no action taken in the name of 'humanitarian aid' is meaningful when its government's interest is to promote chaos for its own benefit.

Against this background, what the world is experiencing is a drowning kick from a declining superpower. That is why it is trying so desperately to cling to its last remaining bastion of influence in the world—Latin America—ergo its fixation with Venezuela and other nations in the region. For if the US was really interested in helping, it is time for it to seriously consider intervening, with the same intensity, in its own country.

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

Email : janataweekly@gmail.com
Website:www.janataweekly.org

The Christchurch Shooting and the Normalisation of Anti-Muslim Terrorism

Whitney Webb

What is without question the worst mass shooting in New Zealand's history took place on Friday when shooters, 28-year-old Australian Brenton Tarrant among them, opened fire at two Christchurch mosques. Four, including Tarrant, have been arrested for the heinous act, which claimed at least 49 innocent lives. Tarrant was responsible for killing more than 40 victims, among them several children, in a rampage he live-streamed on Facebook, sending chills throughout the Muslim community, particularly Muslims living in Western countries.

Tarrant's motives and ideology, laid bare in a 74-page manifesto, show a concern over the fertility rates of non-white groups as well as the immigration of non-whites to countries like New Zealand and Australia, which he likened to an "invasion" that threatened the white majority in those countries. However, Tarrant—in his ignorance—failed to grasp that many of the Muslim immigrants he targeted had come to New Zealand after fleeing Western-backed invasions, occupations, or persecution in their home countries.

Notable among Tarrant's views

is the fact that he is a clear ethno-nationalist, promoting his view that different ethnic groups must be kept "separate, unique, undiluted in [sic] unrestrained in cultural or ethnic expression and autonomy." Tarrant also claimed that he doesn't necessarily hate Muslims and only targeted those Muslims (i.e., immigrants) that chose "to invade our lands, live on our soil and replace our people."

He also stated that he chose to target Muslims because "Islamic nations, in particular, have high birth rates, regardless of race or ethnicity" and to satiate "a want for revenge against Islam for the 1,300 years of war and devastation that it has brought upon the people of the West and other peoples of the world." His views are remarkably similar to those of Norwegian terrorist Anders Breivik, which is unsurprising given that Tarrant named him as an inspiration for the shooting.

Though many—in the hours after the shooting—have sought to place blame and point fingers at notable demagogues like President Donald Trump or "counter-jihad" alt-right figures like Laura Loomer and Jacob Wohl, it is important

to place Tarrant's motivations in context.

Indeed, while Trump's rise to political power has brought Islamophobic rhetoric into the public sphere in an undeniable way, it is a symptom of a much broader effort aimed at propagandising the people of the United States and other Western countries to support wars in and military occupations of Muslim-majority countries. This manufactured Islamophobia, largely a product of Western governments and a compliant mass media, has sought to vilify all Muslims by maligning the religion itself as terrorism, in order to justify the plunder of their countries and deflect attention from their suffering.

It is a classic "divide and conquer" scam aimed at keeping Westerners divided from Muslims in their own countries and abroad. The horrific shooting in Christchurch is a testament to its unfortunate success and pervasiveness, as well as a potent reminder that it must be stopped. Indeed, this manufactured Islamophobia has made it so that Muslims in their home countries are in danger of dying from Western-backed wars and, if they flee to the "safer" West, they have targets on their backs painted by the very war propaganda used to justify Western military adventurism in Muslim-majority nations.

Islam, the media and "Forever Wars": Who's the "real" terrorist?

Since September 11th and the advent of the "War on Terror," mass media reporting increasingly began to conflate Muslims and Muslim-majority nations with war, terrorism and violence in general. Indeed, 9 out of 10 mainstream news reports on Muslims, Islam, and Islamic organisations are related

to violence and Muslims who are named on mainstream media are all-too-frequently warlords or terrorist leaders.

This near-constant association of Islam and violence has created the false perception that the religion of Islam, by its very nature, is violent and that Muslims too must then be violent and thus dangerous. This media-driven association has had very real and troubling consequences. For instance, a 2010 study by the University of Exeter found "empirical evidence to demonstrate that assailants of Muslims are invariably motivated by a negative view of Muslims they have acquired from either mainstream or extremist nationalist reports or commentaries in the media." In other words, Islamophobic media reports are directly related to hate crimes targeting Muslims.

This is no accident, as such biased reporting on Muslim-majority nations also began as Western-backed wars in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan sought to put these countries' natural resources, namely their oil and mineral wealth, into the hands of American corporations. It should be no surprise then that top funders of media outlets that have routinely promoted Islamophobic narratives are also those who have profited considerably from the "War on Terror" and Western-backed regime-change wars in other countries.

This concerted effort to vilify Muslims has had the potent effect, likely by design, of reducing empathy among Westerners for the largely Muslim victims of Western military adventurism in Muslim-majority countries. Indeed, while mainstream news outlets often trumpet the imminent dangers Americans face from "radical Islamic terror," the

death toll of innocent people—most of them Muslim—that have been killed by the US-led "War on Terror" is several orders of magnitude greater than the number of Americans who have died from all terror attacks over that same period.

For instance, from 2001 to 2013, an estimated 3,380 Americans died from domestic and foreign terrorism, including the September 11 attacks as well as acts of domestic terrorism carried out by white nationalists and supremacists. If one excludes the September 11 death toll, the number of American deaths over that same period stands at around 400, most of them victims of mass-killers who were not Muslim.

By comparison, an estimated 8 million innocent people in Muslim-majority nations died as a result of US policies and wars in the Middle East and North Africa from 2001 to 2015. Yet, the magnitude of this loss of life of these "unworthy victims" is minimised by media and government silence, and the creation of a climate of Islamophobia in the West has only served to deepen the ease with which mass murder is accepted by the aggressor countries' populations.

Beyond the staggering disparity in the death tolls caused by terror groups and Western-backed imperialist wars is the fact that many of these very Western governments that purport to be so concerned with "radical Islamic terror" have often created and funded the most notorious terror groups of all. Indeed, the US government helped to create Al Qaeda and continues to protect its Syrian branch—Hayat Tahrir al-Sham—in Syria's Idlib province to this day. In addition, the CIA was just recently revealed to be helping the Islamic State regroup in Syrian refugee camps. Furthermore,

the US has long turned a blind eye to the funding of terror groups by allied states like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The role of Western money, arms and policy in the creation and maintenance of radical Wahhabi terrorist groups is often entirely ignored by Western media portrayals of Muslim-majority nations, thereby creating a false image that such violence is endemic to these nations when, in fact, it is often imported state-sponsored terror.

These nuances of the situation are rarely heard in the narratives parroted out on mainstream media and those who regularly consume mainstream news sources are more likely than not to support those narratives. For that reason, it is easy to see how someone like Donald Trump—who is said to watch television for eight hours every day, much of it Fox News—has espoused the views that he has. Thanks to the manufacturing of Islamophobia of mainstream media, racist policies like the so-called “Muslim ban” have found wide support, as this false narrative has conflated Islam with violence so often that many have come to believe that only by banning Islam can violence and terrorism in the US be reduced.

However, the recent shooting in Christchurch, as well as the Tree of Life Synagogue shooting and other recent acts of domestic terrorism, should alert us to the fact that it is the hate manufactured by this false narrative that is itself endangering American lives while also covering up the mass murder that has been perpetrated by the US and other governments around the world for decades.

Israel’s leading role in stoking ethnonationalism

While the realities of post-9/11 America, as well as the rise in visibility of white ethnonationalism during the Trump Era, have done much to normalise attacks on immigrants, the country that has done the most to normalise anti-Muslim terrorism over this same time frame has been the state of Israel.

Israel, from its founding days, has long been steeped in neocolonialist ideology that is remarkably similar to the ideological basis behind other settler states like the United States, Australia and New Zealand. This system of beliefs holds that the native inhabitants of the land—whether the Palestinians, the Sioux or the Maori—are “primitive” and incompetent and that the land would have remained “wild” and undeveloped were it not for the “fortunate” appearance of European settlers. Such narratives cast these settlers as both superior and normal while the natives become inferior and abnormal, thus obfuscating the settler’s status as foreigner and conqueror.

In Israel’s case, this ideology has promoted the idea that all Arabs are “sons of the desert” while the desert simultaneously represents a barbaric obstacle to “progress” and development. However, the state of Israel, under the lengthy tenure of current Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, has seen these long-standing and somewhat hidden underpinnings of the Zionist state burst out into the open.

The result has been the overt expression of ethnonationalism in such a way that Israel has become an inspiration to white nationalists in the United States, like Richard Spencer, and far-right ethno-fascist leaders like Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro and India’s Narendra Modi. The

inspiration has been mutual, according to reports and testimonials published by Jewish newspaper *The Forward*.

For years, through its military occupation of Palestine, Israel’s government and military have sought to paint all Palestinians, including children, as “terrorists” or “terrorist sympathisers.” Take, for example, current Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked, who wrote in 2014, “This is a war between two people. Who is the enemy? The Palestinian people . . .”

A more recent example came from former Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman, who asserted just last year that “no innocent people” live in the Gaza Strip and that every inhabitant in the enclave is somehow connected to Hamas, even though nearly half of Gaza’s population are children and teenagers. Such rhetoric has become par for the course and numerous examples show that Shaked and Lieberman’s views are increasingly accepted and “normal” in today’s Israel.

No ‘clash of civilisations,’ only manipulation and exploitation of differences

The tragic and barbaric shooting in Christchurch, New Zealand is yet another horrific and glaring reminder that the “divide and conquer” war propaganda that has sought to promote the so-called “clash of civilisations” between Christianity and Islam, West and East, has not only been monstrously effective but continues to be monstrously destructive to people on both sides.

However, the media’s manufacture of Islamophobia, in seeking to reduce empathy for Muslim suffering and reduce Western empathy for innocent

Muslim civilians, has increasingly placed targets on the back of Muslims everywhere—in the West and the East—making it increasingly difficult for practitioners of the Islamic faith to feel safe regardless of where they live.

With most Muslim-majority countries now killing fields in Western-backed wars, ruled by oppressive, Western-backed dictatorships, or under threat of Western-backed regime change, even those Muslims who have sought a safer, quieter life in the “civilised” West have now found themselves targets thanks to the very war propaganda used to justify the destruction of their home countries.

While the murderer Tarrant had stated that he hoped his horrific crime would help stoke “civil war” in Western countries, this tragedy should and must serve as a wake up call for people everywhere that the real forces responsible for the destruction of many Muslim-majority countries and the current chaos present in many Western countries are not generated by civilian populations or religions but instead by the global oligarchy that engineers and profits from this chaos. These oligarchs loot from the people of the West just as they do from the people of the East and it is time to recognise that they are the real threats to a more peaceful world—not regular people praying, whether it be in a church, a synagogue or a mosque.

(Whitney Webb is a MintPress News journalist based in Chile, and also contributes to several other independent media outlets. She is the 2019 winner of the Serena Shim Award for Uncompromised Integrity in Journalism.)

Bhagat Singh Is Not the Man the Right Wants You to Think He Is

Christophe Jaffrelot

In the mid 1920s, the Kakori Conspiracy Case left the revolutionary movement headless, as all its front-ranking leaders were arrested and sent to the gallows or to jail. The following generation of militants—who were to revive the movement—was of a different kind. The strongest personality in this group, Bhagat Singh, is proof of this. Born in Lyallpur, Punjab, to a Sikh family that came under the influence of the Arya Samaj and the Ghadr Party—his uncle Ajit Singh had been deported to Mandalay along with Lajpat Rai when he was a child—Bhagat Singh was trained at the National College of Lahore. He was particularly shocked by the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre in Amritsar in 1919, where General Dyer killed hundreds of people. He then took part in the non-cooperation movement, and like many others joined the revolutionary movement after Mahatma Gandhi suspended the non-cooperation struggle. In 1926, he started the Naujawan Bharat Sabha and tried to draw the youth from the province into its fold, in order to develop a socialist and non-religious organisation. If the British were naturally the chosen target of Bhagat Singh, he also put the blame on his compatriots, paralysed by superstitions:

A branch of peepal tree is cut and religious feelings of the Hindus are injured. A corner of a paper idol, tazia of the idol-breaker Mohammedans is broken, and ‘Allah’ gets enraged, who cannot be satisfied with anything less than

the blood of the infidel Hindus. Man should receive more attention than the beasts and yet, in India, people break their heads in the name of ‘sacred beasts’.

The combination of socialism, humanism and nationalism that was the trademark of Bhagat Singh was going to become even stronger after the launch of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) in September 1928. While Bhagat Singh remained the key figure of the HSRA, among its leaders were other outstanding men, including Sukhdev, a great admirer of communism, Vijay Kumar Sinha, an avid reader, Shiv Verma and Chandrashekhar Azad, who was in charge of the Association’s “military” operations. These men formed a Central Committee, which included two representatives of each province where the movement was well established—Punjab, the United Provinces and Bihar. The organisation was immediately divided into two branches, the ideological and the military. Bhagat Singh was at the helm of the former but took part in the latter too. Indeed, he was directly involved in the assassination of J.P. Saunders, a policeman who had been mistaken for the police chief J.A. Scott, whom Bhagat Singh held responsible for the death of Lala Lajpat Rai. An Arya Samaji and a Congress leader, Lajpat Rai had been killed after a lathi charge while he and others demonstrated against the Simon Commission’s Lahore visit. Like terrorists of the 19th century, the

HRSA thought—expressed in an “official” communiqué—that by killing Saunders, it could “let the world know that India still lives; that the blood of youths has not been totally cooled down and that they can still risk their lives if the honour of their nation is at stake”.

But Bhagat Singh transitioned from terrorism to revolution. In his last piece of writing—drafted in February 1931—he refers to his past action in a very telling manner:

Apparently I have acted as a terrorist. But I am not a terrorist. I am a revolutionary who has got such definite ideas of a lengthy programme... Let me announce with all the strength at my command, that I am not a terrorist and never was, (except) perhaps at the beginning of my revolutionary career.

Bhagat Singh’s worldview had been reshaped in the meantime by some rare readings. The list of authors in his library shows many books by various Western authors. One finds there Marx, Engels, Trotsky, Thomas Paine, Upton Sinclair, Morris Hillquit, Jack London, Victor Hugo, Dostoevsky, Spinoza, Bertrand Russell, John Stuart Mill, Thomas Jefferson, Kautsky, Bukharin, Burke, Lenin, Thomas d’Aquin, Danton, Omar Khayyam, Tagore, N.A. Morozov, Herbert Spencer, Henry Maine and Rousseau.

These books, that Bhagat Singh read in jail as much as before being arrested, contributed to making him a rationalist and a socialist. He was the first revolutionary to express clearly his rejection of religion in *Why I am an atheist*, written in prison—just when he was condemned to death. In this text, Bhagat Singh states lucidly how he awaits death without hoping for a life beyond:

A God-believing Hindu might be expecting to be reborn as a king, a Muslim or a Christian, might dream of the luxuries to be enjoyed in paradise and the reward he is to get for his sufferings and sacrifices. But what am I to expect? I know the moment the rope is fitted round my neck and rafters removed, from under my feet. That will be the final moment—that will be the last moment. I, or to be more precise, my soul, as interpreted in the metaphysical terminology, shall all be finished there. Nothing further. A short life of struggle with no such magnificent end, shall in itself be the reward if I have the courage to take it in that light. That is all. With no selfish motive, or desire to be awarded here or hereafter, quite disinterestedly have I devoted my life to the cause of independence, because I could not do otherwise. The day we find a great number of men and women with this psychology who cannot devote themselves to anything else than the service of mankind and emancipation of the suffering humanity; that day shall inaugurate the era of liberty.

Bhagat Singh’s rejection of religion, which alienates the masses, complemented his socialist criticism of two systems of oppression—capitalism and casteism. Before that, Indian revolutionaries had only targeted capitalism and colonialism.

In February 1931, Bhagat Singh, inviting the youth to embrace Marxism, pointed out that “Revolution means the complete overthrow of the existing social order and its replacement with the socialist order. For that purpose our immediate aim is the achievement of power. As a matter of fact, the state, the government machinery is just a weapon in the hands of the ruling

class to further safeguard its interest. We want to snatch and handle it to utilise it for the consummation of our ideal, i.e., social reconstruction on new, i. e. Marxist basis.”

In fact, Bhagat Singh is a Janus-like figure, combining different sources of inspiration, some of them Marxist, others harking back to the anarchists’ “propaganda by action”. This is evident from his last deed. On April 8, 1929, along with B.K. Dutt, he threw two bombs in the Central Legislative Assembly “to make the deaf hear”, as written on the tracts they distributed in the assembly after their lightening coup. This formula was borrowed from Auguste Vaillant, a French anarchist. But Bhagat Singh also presented this action as being part of a larger game plan. First, it was aimed at dissuading the assembly from voting for a law—the Public Safety and Trade Disputes Bill—whose implementation would have penalised Indian workers. Second, it was also meant to denounce the manner in which this so-called Indian parliament projected itself—as an accomplice of the British. Finally, it aimed at avenging the death of Lajpat Rai. All these explanations relate this act as much to the anarchist as to the socialist agenda. The latter side of the coin shows that Bhagat Singh did not valorise violence. To get a proper understanding of his political philosophy, one must read till the end the leaflet that Bhagat Singh and Dutt threw in the assembly after hurling their bombs. Its concluding words are remarkable:

We are sorry to admit that we who attach so great a sanctity to human life, who dream of a glorious future, when man will be enjoying perfect peace and full liberty, have been forced to shed human blood.

These words reveal a denial of violence, a denial that would take a more systematic form in the declaration of Singh and Dutt made before the judges. There, they would emphasise that the two bombs had been thrown at the unoccupied rows and that their composition—the details of which they provide, like great chemists—made them inoffensive: had they been loaded with some other high explosive, with destructive pellets or darts, they could have wiped out a majority of the members of the legislative assembly.

Singh and Dutt even defended themselves against their recourse to violence—they merely speak of “force”:

We are next to none in our love for humanity. Far from having any malice against any individual, we hold human life sacred beyond words . . . Our sole purpose was ‘to make the deaf hear’ and to give the heedless a timely warning . . . Force when aggressively applied is ‘violence’ and is therefore, morally unjustifiable, but when it is used in the furtherance of a legitimate cause, it has its moral justification.”

Interestingly, Bhagat Singh regarded Jesus Christ as one of his role models, like Gandhi: “If we set aside motive, then Jesus Christ will appear a man responsible for breaking peace and preaching revolt, and a dangerous personality in the language of the law. But we worship him. He commands great respect and a place in our hearts; the sight of his image fills us with spiritual energy”.

Not only did Bhagat Singh, a truly exceptional revolutionary, never pay allegiance to Hinduism, but he also actually valued non-violence.

Macron to Deploy French Army Against “Yellow Vest” Protests

Anthony Torres

After a meeting of the council of ministers on March 20, French government spokesman Benjamin Griveaux announced that President Emmanuel Macron would activate army units during this weekend’s “yellow vest” protests. This is the first time since the 1954–1962 war in Algeria that the army is to be mobilised in police operations on French soil against the population.

Griveaux announced that the operation would have the task of “securing fixed and static points in conformity with their mission, that is to say principally the protection of official buildings.” He justified his recourse to the armed forces by claiming this was necessary to allow the police forces to “concentrate on protest movements and on the maintenance and re-establishment of public order.”

The mobilisation of army units comes on top of a series of repressive measures the government announced on Tuesday. These include allowing the state to ban protests if “radicals” attend them, increasing fines for participating in a banned protest from 38 to 135 euros, the setting up of “anti-hooligan brigades” of police, the use of drones, the firing of chemical agents allowing police to trace demonstrators, and the use of police checkpoints to stop and identify demonstrators.

The resort to the French army to threaten protests against social inequality marks a historical turning point of international significance. A wave of strikes and protests is spreading across the world, driven

by mounting political anger at decades of austerity and militarism. These range from protests by the “yellow vests” to strikes against decade-long wage freezes across Europe, to the mass protests against the Algerian military dictatorship, to the strikes of US teachers and Mexican maquiladora workers and mass strikes in Sri Lanka and India.

Macron’s decision to deploy the army against the “yellow vests” is part of the increasingly desperate attempts of the ruling class internationally to intimidate the rising political opposition among workers and, failing that, to create conditions to try to repress it through force of arms.

The government is deploying the army amid the media frenzy that followed the looting of the Champs-Élysées avenue in Paris during last Saturday’s “yellow vest” protests. But there is no hard evidence that “yellow vest” protesters carried out this looting. Top officials, including Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo, have said these actions were committed by far-right groups who exploited a breakdown in the chain of command of the police forces, some of whom were filmed joining in the looting of shops on the Champs-Élysées.

Despite the murkiness of last Saturday’s events, the government is responding by rapidly stepping up threats against protesters. Interior Minister Christophe Castaner brazenly declared that on Saturday, police were facing “10,000 hooligans,” implying that the vast majority of peaceful

“yellow vest” protesters were violent criminals whom police could treat as such. Speaking about the violence on Saturday, Macron for his part provocatively declared that supporters of the “yellow vest” movement “have made themselves complicit in it.”

The looting on Saturday is only a pretext for the implementation of plans that have been long prepared. A possible resort to the army inside France has been publicly discussed for several years, since the then-ruling Socialist Party (PS) began calling for dispatching the army to working class districts of Marseille and other cities under President François Hollande.

The use of troops to crack down on domestic political opposition underscores the correctness of long-standing opposition of radical socialists to fraudulent claims that the “war on terror” launched by Washington and its European allies aims to protect the people. The PS began Operation Sentinel under the state of emergency it declared after the November 13, 2015 terror attacks in Paris. Now Macron, a former minister in the PS government, is using these supposedly “anti-terror” troops to reinforce the mobile police squads he is throwing against the “yellow vests.”

Sensing itself to be deeply isolated and despised by workers internationally, and terrified by rising protests in both France and Algeria, the financial aristocracy intends to wage ruthless class war. A February article in the *Monde diplomatique* titled “Class struggles in France” pointed to the panic seizing broad sections of the ruling class amid the growing political opposition that is for now largely peaceful but also very deep in the French and

international working class.

The monthly wrote, “Fear, not of losing an election, or failing to ‘reform’, or to take stock market losses. But of insurrection, of revolt, of destitution. For a half century, the French elites had not experienced such a feeling. . . . The director of a polling institute mentioned for his part ‘big CEOs who were indeed very worried,’ and an atmosphere ‘that resembles what I have read about 1936 or 1968’ (the two French general strikes). There is a moment where they tell themselves, we have to be able to spend a lot of money to avoid losing what is essential.”

And so the financial aristocracy is pouring resources into repression and breaking with longstanding guarantees that the army would not be sent to fire on the population. After former PS presidential candidate Ségolène Royal called for sending the army to Marseille in 2013, history professor Jean-Marc Berlière reviewed the history of the French army’s use for police operations in an interview in *Le Monde*.

In the 19th century, Berlière explained, the army’s repeated murder of workers, including women and children, during strikes and May Day rallies provoked enormous class anger: “Massacres like those that periodically took place—at Fourmies, Narbonne, and so on—seriously hurt its image, which was already badly damaged by suspicion of social and political collusion due to its engagement during strikes on the side of the employers.”

After the October 1917 Revolution in Russia during World War I, which saw mass mutinies in the French army, the government decided it could no longer trust the army for domestic policing. “After the victory and the sacrifices of the

1914–1918 war, it was no longer possible to use the victorious army for internal operations,” Berlière said. Asked whether the French army was active after World War I in domestic policing inside the borders of current-day France, he added: “Basically, no. The political risk was too great: what would be the attitude of the conscripts?”

After the army’s infamous resort to mass torture and murder in a failed attempt to keep Algeria under French rule during the 1954–1962 independence war, Macron is again turning to the army. His hailing last year of Nazi-collaborationist dictator Philippe Pétain as well as Georges Clemenceau—who as interior minister before World War I oversaw army operations leading to the murder of 18 workers—reflect continuous official attempts to legitimise repression.

This underscores the reactionary character of continuous proclamations from within the political establishment that socialist and working-class politics are irrelevant and dead. They create conditions where a deployment of the army against working people, lacking any shred of legitimacy, proceeds without meaningful opposition in official French life. The central task, in which the “yellow vest” protests mark an initial step, is to independently mobilise the growing political opposition in the working class against this drive to military–police dictatorship.

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Why India Must Take Seriously the Right to Dissent

Hamid Ansari

I deem it a privilege to be invited to deliver the First Ram Manohar Lohia Lecture. I am also happy for this opportunity to visit the campus of the ITM University, Gwalior and to interact in some measure with the academic community present here.

No single adjective, or set of adjectives, can adequately describe Ram Manohar Lohia. For over two decades he was the 'stormy petrel' of Indian politics. He was erudite and had a passionate interest in all matters relating to human freedom, justice and dignity. He earned recognition of his knowledge of law from none other than the British magistrate trying him for preaching against the war effort in 1939. Earlier, in November 1936, he joined Jawaharlal Nehru when the latter founded the Indian Civil Liberties Union (ICLU) with Rabindranath Tagore as its president. The concept of civil liberties, Lohia said on that occasion, "defines state authority within clear limits. The task of the State is to protect these liberties. But States usually do not like the task and act contrarily. Armed with the concept of civil liberties, the people develop an agitation to force the State to keep within clear and well defined limits".

Dr. Lohia was an idealist and had his icons in the early period; Mahatma Gandhi represented his "dream", Nehru his "desire" and Subhash Bose his "deed". This idealism led him to request Gandhi ji to propose to world leaders a four point program: (1) cancellation

of all past investments by one country in another; (2) unobstructed passage and the right of settlement to everybody all over the world; (3) political freedom of all peoples and nations of the world and constituent assemblies; and (4) some kind of world citizenship.

Gandhi ji was indulgent but did not act on the suggestion.

Lohia was a socialist and an avowed anti-communist. He was amongst the few who struggled with the difficulty of transferring the ideology of socialism from Europe to non-European cultural locations. He differed with the Congress leadership on a whole range of issues. These included the acceptance of the decision on Partition in 1947 and he wrote a detailed monograph entitled *The Guilty Men of India's Partition*. He had pronounced views on the caste system and the damage it has done to Indian psyche. These were candidly, albeit brutally, expressed in another monograph, *The Caste System*. At the same time, he was realistic about ways of modulating it, as is evident from the following passage:

To stop talking of caste is to shut ones eyes to the most important single reality of the Indian situation. One does not end caste merely by wishing it away. A 5000 year long selection of abilities has been taking place. Certain castes have become especially gifted. Thus for instance the Marwari Bania is on top with regard to industry and finance and the Saraswat Brahmin

in respect of intellectual pursuits. It is absurd to talk about competing with these castes unless others are given preferential opportunities and privileges. The narrowing selection of abilities must now be broadened over the whole and that can only be done if for two or three or four decades backward castes and groups are given preferential opportunities. I must here make distinction between opportunities for employment and those for education. No one should be turned away from the portals of an educational institution because of his caste. Society on the other hand would be perfectly justified in turning those away from its employment whom it has so far privileged. Let them earn their living elsewhere. Society is required alone to equip them with the necessary educational ability.

Despite the adulation of earlier years, Lohia's criticism of Nehru and his policies after early 1940s was trenchant. His articulation of the principles of the Congress Socialist Party transmuted itself in the fifties into the Praja Socialist Party which, as he put it, "is as distant from the Congress party as it is from the communist and the communalist parties." He had a nuanced view of the parliamentary form of government and advocated alongside the option of direct mass action. He told his party colleagues in 1955 that instead of an insurrectionary path they ought to choose a balanced mix of constitutional action and civil resistance where necessary.

(Complete text of the First Ram Manohar Lohia Memorial lecture delivered by Vice President Hamid Ansari at Gwalior on September 23, 2015.)

Lohia's advocacy of issues relating to farmers took a practical shape in 1954 when the UP Government increased irrigation rates for water supplied from canals to cultivators. In his speeches in the area, he incited cultivators not to pay "the enhanced irrigation rates" to government. He was severely critical of the state Government. He was arrested and charged under Section 3 of the UP Special Powers Act, 14 of 1932. In a habeas corpus petition in the High Court, he contended that the Act, and particularly Section 3 of it, stood repealed under Article 13 of the Constitution on account of its being inconsistent with the provisions of Article 19. The Court, in its judgment, addressed two questions: firstly, that Section 3 of the Act, making it penal for a person by spoken words to instigate a class of persons not to pay dues recoverable as arrears of land revenue, was inconsistent with Article 19 (1) (a) of the Constitution and secondly, that the restrictions imposed by this section were not in the interests of public order. The Court ordered that he be released, and costs paid.

Throughout the fifties and early part of 1960s, Lohia's critique of government policies was unrelenting. He was elected to the Lok Sabha in August 1963 and a few days later delivered a sharply focused speech in an adjournment motion expressing dissatisfaction with the government's policies and postures. He even used some archaic expressions: "Parliament," he said, "is the master whereas the Prime Minister is its servant. The servant has to behave modestly and politely with his master." He utilised the parliamentary platform to express powerfully his views on what he considered were shortfalls

in domestic and foreign policy issues. At the time of the Presidential election in 1969 in which he was an ardent supporter of the former Chief Justice of India Subba Rao, he called upon the youth to think about politics focused on five principles: socialist unity, unity of all opposition parties, joint demonstrations, single purpose platforms and hard work.

Rammanohar Lohia's political legacy and the impulses generated by it are very much in evidence today and have been so for over two decades. "In the world of politics," as one of his ardent scholar-activist followers has put it, "Lohia is remembered today as the originator of OBC reservations; the champion of backward castes in the politics of north India; the father of non-Congressism; the uncompromising critic of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty; and the man responsible for the politics of anti-English."

Commentary on this graphic summing up is unnecessary. Time and experience will tell if Lohia would have urged a greater measure of flexibility in the strategies of affirmative action currently underway. My purpose this afternoon is to focus on the principle of dissent in democracy that Dr. Lohia personified and its relevance for the continuing success of functioning democracies anywhere in the world.

II

In 1950, the People of India gave themselves a Constitution that promised to secure to all citizens, inter alia, "liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship." This was given a concrete shape by the specific rights guaranteed by Articles 19 and 25 and the associated framework ensuring their implementation. The past six and a half decades have

witnessed the manner, and the extent, of their actualisation.

The Constitution was not crafted in a vacuum. It was preceded by the Freedom Movement and the values enunciated in it. These were formally encapsulated in the Objectives Resolution of January 22, 1947. At the same time the Constitution-makers, or some amongst them, were not unaware of the pitfalls. In his speech at the end of the drafting process in the Constituent Assembly, Ambedkar had warned about the impending "life of contradictions."

Ambedkar spoke of the danger posed to political democracy by disconnect between political equality and socio-economic inequality. A few decades later two eminent sociologists commented on some of its underlying aspects. They noted the backdrop of two competing narratives: "the civilisational history of co-survival of communities and the political history of ethnic competition and conflicts." They said, "the use of the coercive power of the State for effecting homogenisation in the society and the counter-violence by the political-cultural entities resisting such incursions by the State constitute the problem of the political system in India today." They enquired "whether the institutional imperiousness of the liberal State can be effectively countered by the popular movements" and felt the challenge in India "is to discover and press on the softer edges of the space within which the transformative, democratic movements find themselves enclosed. In this sense, the challenge for these movements is as much intellectual as political."

The quest for correctives often found expression through assertions relating to freedom of expression and its concomitant, the concept

of dissent. It is a concept that contains within it the democratic right to object, oppose, protest and even resist. Cumulatively it can be defined as the unwillingness in an individual or group to cooperate with an established authority—social, cultural or governmental. In that sense, it is associated with critical thinking since, as Albert Einstein put it, “blind faith in authority is the greatest enemy of truth”.

It has been observed with much justice that the history of progress of mankind is a history of informed dissent. This can take many forms ranging from conscientious objection to civil or revolutionary disobedience. In a democratic society, including ours, the need to accept difference of opinion is an essential ingredient of plurality. In that sense, the right of dissent also becomes the duty of dissent since tactics to suppress dissent tend to diminish the democratic essence. In a wider sense, the expression of dissent can and does play a role in preventing serious mistakes arising out of what has been called “social cascades” and “group polarisation” which act as deterrent on free expression of views or sharing of information.

Dissent as a right has been recognised by the Supreme Court of India as one aspect of the right of the freedom of speech guaranteed as a Fundamental Right by Article 19 (1) (a) of the Constitution. The court has observed that “the restrictions on the freedom of speech must be couched in the narrowest possible terms” and that the proviso of Article 19(2) is justiciable in the sense that the restrictions on it have to be “reasonable” and cannot be arbitrary, excessive or disproportionate.

In the globalising world of

today and in most countries having a democratic fabric, the role of civil society in the articulation of dissent has been and continues to be comprehensively discussed; so does the question of its marginalisation or suppression.

III

Despite the unambiguously stated position in law, civil society concerns about constraints on the right of dissent in actual practice have been articulated powerfully. “On the surface,” wrote one of our eminent academics some time back, “Indian democracy has a cacophony of voices. But if you scratch the surface, dissent in India labours under an immense maze of threats and interdictions.” Referring to the then new reporting requirements for NGOs, he said:

“nothing is more fatal for disagreements and dissent than the idea that all of it can be reduced to hidden sub-texts or external agendas . . . The idea that anyone who disagrees with my views must be the carrier of someone else’s subversive agenda is, in some ways, deeply anti-democratic. It does away with the possibility of genuinely good faith disagreement. It denies equal respect to citizens because it absolves you of taking their ideas seriously. Once we have impugned the source, we don’t have to pay attention to the contents of the claim . . . This has serious consequences for dissent.”

This was written in 2012. It is a moot point if, given the Pavlovian reflexes of the Leviathan, things would have changed for the better since then. Informed commentaries suggest the contrary.

Every citizen of the Republic has the right and the duty to judge. Herein lies the indispensability of dissent.

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‘Patriotism’ Made Easy in Times of ‘WhatsApp Elections’

Subhash Gatade

There was a time when ‘Good Morning’ messages were causing much “pain” to internet giants?

It was the beginning of last year when the obsession of Indians with starting their day with a deluge of ‘Good Morning’ messages flooded WhatsApp, and generated a lot of chuckle. But it but also raised serious concerns such as the overloading WhatsApp servers, and clogging Android phones.

We were told how millions of Indians were getting online for the first time and how everyone was getting hooked on to WhatsApp. Their obsession with sending such messages was causing “some serious pain for Internet giants.” Not only WhatsApp but even Google researchers in Silicon Valley had noted how “internet newbies are overloading their Android phones with Good Morning messages.”

Nobody then had any premonition that India would shortly come under scanner for the spread of online disinformation and fake news resulting in a string of murders and growth of anti-minority sentiments. A report published by BBC’s Beyond Fake News Series had tried to corroborate this.

In the programme, Santanu Chakrabarti, the head of audience insight at BBC *World Service*, who conducted the study, shared how the “rise of the Hindu nationalist prime minister, Narendra Modi, had made many Indians feel as though they had a patriotic duty to forward information.”

According to Chakrabarti, Indians “are effectively looking for

validation of their belief systems and on these platforms, then, validation of identity trumps verification of the fact.” The large study, focussing on Kenya, Nigeria and India, studied how people react to and spread fake news. Cheap cost of data coupled with rising (what is construed as) nationalist sentiment was found to be behind the widespread sharing of fake news.

Actor Prakash Raj, speaking on the challenges posed by fake news at the ‘Beyond Fake News Conference’ organised by BBC attributed this phenomenon to the Bharatiya Janata Party and summarised it by saying how “They have intermingled nationalism, religion and patriotism and so they flood posts on social media blurring historical facts to push this agenda.”

What was worrying was that this investigative report clearly suggested a strong overlap between fake news and pro-Modi political activity. It suggested that the ruling party was actively and effectively peddling fake news about Prime Minister Modi across social media platforms such as Twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook.

It was a sheer coincidence that this BBC report had appeared in the immediate aftermath of elections in Brazil, which had elected a highly controversial Right wing politician, Jair Bolsonaro, as its President—someone who had openly expressed nostalgia for the country’s military dictatorship, or has repeatedly denigrated gender non-conformity and homosexuality and considers the issue of climate change as a Marxist plot.

A story by the *Guardian* newspaper had said “If the Brexit vote and Donald Trump’s charge to the White House were jet-propelled by Facebook, the rise of Brazil’s likely next president, the far-right firebrand Jair Bolsonaro, owes much to WhatsApp” which is “wildly popular in Brazil, with about 120 million active users, and has proved to be the ideal tool for mobilising political support—but also for spreading fake news.”

The menace of fake news had caused so much consternation in the highly polarised, social-media obsessed nation, where misinformation flew free and fast that 24 media organisations—ranging from national newspapers and television networks to specialist and local publications—joined forces under the name Comprova, or Prove It.

And now comes the news that a similar fate awaits India where the coming general elections have been dubbed “WhatsApp elections”.

A WhatsApp-sponsored report, which has been prepared in partnership with Queen Mary University and carried by a leading open space e-journal, ‘*The Conversation*’ has raised the alarm that the 2019 elections in India would be what it calls “WhatsApp Elections”, with its huge spread through damaging “fake news”.

According to the report, *India’s 2019 national elections are widely anticipated to be the “WhatsApp elections”. Against a backdrop of rapidly improving internet connectivity and rising*

smartphone use, the number of people using private messaging service WhatsApp has soared since its India launch in mid-2010 to more than 200 million—more users than in any other democracy.

And now the country's political parties are moving to capitalise on this mass communication channel. But given WhatsApp has already been used to misinform voters in other elections and spread damaging "fake news" that has led to serious violence in India, there's a danger this could also pose a threat to the democratic process.

Philippa Williams, senior lecturer in human geography, Queen Mary University of London, and Lipika Kamra, assistant professor, Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities, OP Jindal Global University, have jointly conducted this study and the report underlines how "the problem has aggravated with the BJP recruiting 900,000 "cell phone pramukhs" across India to disseminate "information" about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "successes", and Congress is following up by launching appointment of "digital sathis" to counter the BJP."

Underlining how the 'misuse' of WhatsApp has been connected with at least 30 incidents of murder and lynching, for example following the circulation of children abduction rumours' and also success of the Hindu Right 'at mobilising a common socio-political identity', the report expresses grave concerns about the outcome of the coming elections.

How things unfold in the next few weeks would be definitely a matter of concern for everyone, but it is worth raising a debate now on how does one look at the interaction

of technology with wider social and cultural issues. Any technology can at best amplify certain tendencies that already exist in Indian society. A society which already has cleavages on lines of caste, race, gender, religion would be a fertile ground for messages spreading hate.

Remember, it was exactly 25 years ago, that Rwandan genocide

took place. The organised, planned killings of eight lakh Tutsis by Hutus is one of the darkest episodes of the last decade of the 20th century. We should not forget that there was neither WhatsApp then nor any other social media platforms. Newspapers and radio-fitted the bill then.

(The writer is an independent journalist based in Delhi.)

108 Economists Slam Modi Govt For Tweaking Data

A group of 108 economists and social scientists have sounded a pre-election alarm over the Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party government's move to revise or withhold the release of unfavourable or "uncomfortable" economic data.

In an open letter, 108 economists and social scientists have said that Indian statistics and the institutions associated with it have "come under a cloud for being influenced and indeed even controlled by political considerations."

They emphasised the fact that economic statistics are a public good and it is a vital necessity for policy-making and informed public discourse in democracies where citizens seek accountability from its government. Therefore, "it makes it imperative that the agencies associated with collection and dissemination of statistics like Central Statistical Office (CSO) and National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) are not subject to political interference and their work therefore, enjoys total credibility."

The signatories include Abhijit Banerjee, Pranab Bardhan, Jean Dreze, James Boyce, Jayati Ghosh,

Amartya Lahiri, Sudha Narayanan, Ashima Sood, Jayan Jose Thomas, Vamsi Vakulabharanam among others.

Two glaring examples of data-tweaking

Modi is vulnerable over his economic record in the run-up to the polls starting on April 11. In particular, a failure to meet promises to create enough jobs for the million Indians entering the labour market each month, looms large over the BJP. The Modi-BJP Government's decision to withhold the release of the National Sample Survey Organisation's (NSSO) employment survey for the year 2017-18, despite the nod of the National Statistical Commission (NSC), has worsened it's case.

The survey would have shown a record high unemployment rate, but instead the government said that jobs' data had not been finalised.

In December 2018, the schedule for the release of results from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) of the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) was not met. This was the first economy-wide employment survey conducted

by NSSO after 2011–12 and was therefore deemed important, the letter pointed out.

Following this, two members of the National Statistical Commission, including the acting chairman, subsequently resigned because they felt the NSSO was delaying the release of the report, though the NSC itself had officially cleared it. Subsequently, news reports based on leaks of the report showed an unprecedented rise in unemployment rates in 2017–18; this perhaps explained why the government did not want to release the report. There have since been news reports that the PLFS of 2017–18 will be scrapped altogether by the government, the economists noted.

The government has also been criticised for its new back series GDP data that drastically lowered growth rates during the regime of the previous UPA government. In January this year, for instance, the Central Statistical Offices' revised estimates of GDP growth rate for 2016–17 (the year of demonetisation), shot up by 1.1 percentage points to 8.2%, the highest in a decade! "This seems to be at variance with the evidence marshalled by many economists," the press release stated.

According to the open letter, in 2018, two competing back series for varying lengths of time were prepared—separately by two official bodies, (a committee of) the NSC and later by the CSO. The two showed quite opposite growth rates for the last decade. The National Statistical Commission numbers were removed from the official web site and the CSO numbers were later presented to the public by the Niti Aayog, an advisory body which had hitherto no expertise in statistical

data collection

The numbers released by the NITI Aayog were in complete divergence from the numbers arrived at by a sub-committee of the NSC.

Statistical integrity crucial for generating data

The statement said this situation was different from the past wherein India's statistical machinery enjoyed a high level of reputation for the integrity of the data it produced on a range of economic and social parameters.

While official data was often criticised for the quality of estimates, there were never allegations of political interference influencing decisions and the estimates themselves, it said. In fact, any statistics that cast an iota of doubt on the achievement of the government seem to get revised or suppressed on the basis of some questionable methodology.

The signatories to the open letter urged all professional economists, statisticians, independent researchers in policy—regardless of their political and ideological leanings—to come together to raise their voice against the tendency to suppress uncomfortable data, and impress upon the current and future government authorities to restore access and integrity to public statistics and reestablish institutional independence and integrity to the statistical organisations.

The letter concluded stating, "the national and global reputation of India's statistical bodies is at stake. More than that, statistical integrity is crucial for generating data that would feed into economic policy-making and that would make for honest and democratic public discourse."

Additional note (by Editors):

After stopping the release of the release of the NSSO report on unemployment for 2017–18 and the sixth Labour Bureau annual employment-unemployment survey, it has now come to light that the government has also stopped the publication of a third survey on unemployment, this time by the Labour Bureau on the number of jobs created under the Micro Units Development & Refinance Agency (MUDRA). A report published in the Indian Express quoted sources as saying that the report will not be made public for another two months, that is, till after the Lok Sabha elections. The official reason cited are "errors" and "anomalies" in the methodology used for the jobs survey.

The MUDRA programme was launched in April 2015, and provides loans at low rates for people to set up small business and in order to generate jobs through self-employment. Last August, the Department of Financial Services had stated that around 90% of the loans fell in the lowest category of under Rs 50,000—an amount too measly for any serious, even if small, entrepreneurial venture.

The MUDRA survey by the Labour Bureau has covered an estimated 97,000 Mudra beneficiaries who took loans between April 8, 2015 and January 1, 2019. Given the findings of the two suppressed government reports as well as other recent job surveys, it is anybody's guess that the MUDRA survey results would have told a similar story of job losses and joblessness, and so the Modi Government has suppressed this report too.

Venezuela is Extremely Important Because it is the Battle of this Century

Carlos Aznárez, João Pedro Stédile

In February 2019, an International People's Assembly was held in Caracas, capital of Venezuela, in solidarity with the people and government of Venezuela represented by Nicolás Maduro. Almost 500 delegates from 90 countries of the world attended the event, and one of the most ardent supporters of this initiative in the last two years is the leader of the Landless Movement of Brazil, Joao Pedro Stédile. This is an interview with him taken during the Assembly:

Carlos Aznárez: Why an International People's Assembly now?

Joao Pedro Stédile: The effort that we are making with this coordination, instead of any other action by the parties and unions, is to try to gather all the popular forces in the world so that we can promote common struggles against the common enemy of all of us—the imperialists. That is the main reason to look for new forms of international organisation that promote struggles and try to unite the different types of organisations in our countries. In this first Assembly, because of the extent of conflict in Venezuela, which is now the epicenter of the world class struggle, at least in the West, where imperialism seeks by any means to overthrow Venezuela, the number one task, the absolute priority of all of us, is to leave here with an agenda of actions, of denunciation, so that we can develop movements in solidarity with Venezuela and

against imperialism in each of the countries represented here.

CA: I am the devil's advocate: whenever this type of meeting is held, it is proposed to return to the countries and coordinate actions, and then, for some reason or because of the need to respond to the internal situation in each country, these things are not carried out and the documents and resolutions are packed away. Why do you think that this time it is going to happen or it should happen?

JPS: That is our self-critical reflection: we have to get out of paperwork and try to promote more actions. I believe that we should promote concrete struggles and actions because the popular forces that are here are accustomed to processes of popular organisation in their countries. The people attending this meeting are involved in real processes of struggle in their countries. So, we are confident that when they return to their countries they will put the issue of Venezuela, the issue of internationalism, permanently on their agenda in the national struggles they are already waging.

CA: Venezuela is a turning point today in the anti-imperialist struggle. What do you think is the most valid or most effective way of expressing solidarity with Venezuela on the continent?

JPS: It is true that there is tremendous confusion and that is why Venezuela is a key point, because even some left-wing sectors of Latin America and Europe allow

themselves to be influenced by what the capitalist press says. We had invited several European organisations but they refused to come to Venezuela because they claim Venezuela is not a democracy. That is strange. Venezuela is a country that has held 25 elections in 20 years, where the private press is the majority, where the opposition marches every day it wishes; how can we then say that there is no democracy in that country? So, those ideas of the capitalist classes have also influenced sections of the left, especially the most institutional sections, who are moved only by electoral logic, who if they are in an election year believe that it is not very convenient to be seen as being close to Venezuelans because they are radical. It is very similar to what happened in the past, when they isolated themselves from Cuba. But Cuba continues to not only exist, after 60 years of resistance, but is also thriving today with its happy, educated people.

So Venezuela is very important because it is the battle of this century. If the empire succeeds in overthrowing Venezuela, that means that it will have more forces to overthrow Cuba, Nicaragua, and all the processes that propose changes; not only that, even the institutional left that only thinks of elections will have difficulties in winning elections if Venezuela suffers defeat. So, not just for the people's struggles taking place all over the globe, but even for the institutional struggle, it is very important to defend Venezuela

and transform it into a trench of resistance and make it the grave of the Trump government.

CA: In your speeches and statements you tend to criticise the errors of the neo-liberal governments, but in several countries, there is a tendency to not face up to the imperialist offensive and compromise like was done in the past by social democracy. How do you see that, is that valid or do we have need to clearly state the need to advance along the path to socialism?

JPS: Our assessment is that there is a profound crisis of the capitalist mode of production and solution that they are seeking to their problem of accumulation of capital is to launch an offensive to seize control of resources, be it oil, mining, water or even biodiversity, and simultaneously increase the rate of exploitation of the working class by rolling back the gains that have been made by the people during the immediate decades after World War II. In ideological terms, what capital is promoting is the return of the extreme right, as happened in the crisis of the 1930s when it resorted to fascist and Nazi ideology.

The advantage we now have is that the fascists cannot repeat what they did in the 1930s as there is no mass movement of the working class today which can be re-directed along fascist and Nazi lines, and that gives us some security. But, on the other hand, since they don't have the masses, they wage an ideological struggle and use all the weapons they have, television, internet, networks, fake news, to defeat us with their ideology.

The capitalists have themselves defeated social democracy. In Latin America, Europe and the whole world, social democracy was a

means of humanising capital, but capital no longer wants to be human. Capital, in order to recover from its present crisis, has to be the devil and go to the extremes, whether in terms of manipulation of the State or of super-exploitation of nature and human labour, without bothering about the consequences.

Therefore, it would be a mistake for socialists today to think that in order to win elections we have to become like social democrats of the 1950s-60s. Now we need to return to grassroots work, to engage in ideological struggle, to recover our social base which is the working class that has been uprooted, is in a precarious condition, and faces numerous challenges. But we have to reorganise it under forms that are not just unions and the party as we have been used to, but are also new forms, new movements; we need to build a grassroots movement that builds up new forms of participatory democracy, because winning elections alone is not enough, as has been proven in Uruguay, Brazil and Argentina. Of course it is important to win elections, but we must have powerful grassroots forces and movements to achieve structural changes in the economy and in the political system.

CA: There is a phenomenon in Europe that is attracting attention and that is the yellow vests. Strangely enough, this wave comes from Europe and not from Latin America as one might imagine, but one can see elements of an anti-system approach there. Do you think that this phenomenon could help you in building up the new forms of struggle that must be applied to fighting the empire?

JPS: Without a doubt. We are very interested in the movements

that are developing in Europe and the processes that led to their development, and we are going to try to send our people to spend some time there and learn from them the forms they have adopted. It caught our attention because the people participating in the yellow vest movement are part of the working class, it is not a movement of the petty bourgeoisie or disillusioned students as it was once the case in Europe with camps in public squares. We perceive that initiatives are being promoted there by the precarious working class outside the traditional unions and the parties, who when they realised that capitalism is no longer solving their daily problems adopted this form of struggle that seems very interesting to us.

However, it is not question of copying a form and applying it to every country, the significance of it is that the working class in France are being very creative and they have discovered a form that is very suitable to the French reality. That's what we have to look for in Brazil, in Argentina and in each of our countries. In other words, we need to promote a debate in grassroots movements to look for new forms of struggle that will effectively fight the onslaught of capital and cause damage to it, because just with demonstrations, slogans and rallies, we are not being able to stop capital. The yellow vests of France have caused difficulties for capital because they are blocking the roads and so blocking the movement of trucks carrying goods. I congratulate the comrades and I hope that the French left will learn from them and get involved in the movement and also learn how to build links with the disorganised masses.

CA: How is the MST

approaching the struggle at this moment of time in Brazil, where Lula is still in prison, and where even though the government is facing difficulties, but it has been able to force the working class to retreat and withdraw several gains and rights won by the workers in the past?

JPS: The MST is now in a very complex situation. We need to redouble our work and our efforts. Our movement has a peasant base, it developed its experience of class struggle by organising people in the countryside against the landlords and agricultural capital, which are the big transnationals. It is there that we were formed, we became politicised and we understood that Agrarian Reform does not mean only ownership of land for those who work on the land, which was dominant understanding of the Zapatista ideas during the 20th century, but that now Agrarian Reform also means that it primarily a struggle against international capital and its transgenic and agro-toxic technology. It was that struggle that politicised us to understand the limitations of the classic peasant movements.

After the defeats suffered by us because of Lula's imprisonment and now with Bolsonaro's victory, we now face new challenges that require that we advance beyond the struggle for Agrarian Reform and build a broad political struggle. At the same time, we also need to consolidate our movement for Agrarian Reform. But in this, the MST needs to proceed more carefully because the right wing is preparing traps for us, and we fall in them, they will seek to defeat us. Therefore, we need to act with much more wisdom in the countryside, and we will need to mobilise people on a much larger

scale to protect ourselves from the repression that the right-wing is preparing to launch to defeat us. So far, this offensive is being launched by the militias funded by big capital, we have not yet faced repression from the State, from the government of Bolsonaro, but we do not doubt that this is precisely what they desire.

In political terms, what we need to do is to go to the cities and with our militancy and experience, develop a movement that solidly supports the peasantry in the countryside. We have already made our plans and begun their implementation, and for that, we have created in Brazil a broad united front of popular movements called the Popular Brazil Front. To strengthen the grassroots movement, we are developing new forms, one of which is what we call the People's Congress. It is a pompous-sounding name, but it an attempt to challenge the existing political structure. We are going from house to house to talk with the people about their problems, and to motivate them to build and participate in a popular assembly in their neighbourhood, parish, work place. Once these assemblies are held and they are able to attract a significant number of people to participate in them, we then plan to organise municipal assemblies, and then provincial assemblies, to ultimately culminate in the organising of a National People's Congress sometime next year or the end of this year. Through the organising of these assemblies, we hope to motivate the people to participate in politics. We also seeking to discover new means of communication with the people including how to better use the internet networks and how to expand the distribution of our newspaper

among the people, and how to use the cultural medium such as music and theatre more effectively to reach out to the people as these are forms that are more effective in reaching out to the people rather than political discourses to which no one listens today. We have to use other forms of mass pedagogies to interact with the people in Brazil and politicise them, develop new creative forms, like the working people are doing in France about which I talked earlier.

CA: Will Lula and his freedom continue to be on the agenda of the MST?

JPS: That's another big issue in politics in Brazil today. Lula's freedom is at the center of the class struggle in Brazil. There is no successor to Lula because popular leadership is chosen not by the parties but by the people, which is why it is called popular leadership, and Lula is the popular leader of Brazil.

It is a fundamental task for the class struggle that we succeed in liberating Lula so that he becomes the principal spokesman, he is the one who has the capacity to help mobilise the masses against the system and the project of the extreme right. That's why the extreme right is terrified and prevents him from even speaking, giving interviews, something that goes against the Constitution. Any narco-trafficker in Brazil speaks on national television, but Lula cannot give an interview even to a written newspaper.

So, we are fighting for Lula's freedom, which is going to depend on two important factors. One is international solidarity, which is why I take this opportunity through this interview with you to ask everyone to help us. The second factor is the national mobilisation that we are

developing in Brazil, in which we are linking up the campaign for freeing Lula to the concrete struggle against neo-liberal policies. We want

people to realise that if they want to defend the rights they have won in the past, which the government is seeking to eliminate today, they will

have to fight against the policies of neoliberal government in power in Brazil today.

What can Karl Marx Offer to the 21st Century?

Anjan Basu

Eric Hobsbawm, the well-known historian, recalls how George Soros once asked him about what Hobsbawm thought of Karl Marx. This was at the turn of the 21st century.

Surprised, and also aware that there was hardly any meeting ground between the billionaire hedge-funds wizard and champion of the free market and a Marxist historian who refused to renounce his membership of the British Communist Party even when the party faced liquidation, Hobsbawm chose to give an ambiguous answer.

Soros' rejoinder was startling. "That man," he said, "discovered something about capitalism 150 years ago that we must take notice of."

Also, in 1998, as the *Communist Manifesto* turned 150, the editor of the inflight magazine of United Airlines (UA) approached Hobsbawm with a request that amazed the historian. Would he consent to UA using, for their magazine, portions of an article Hobsbawm had written to mark the anniversary, so that American (mostly business) travellers could acquaint themselves with what the *Manifesto* talked about?

But this curiosity about what Karl Marx wrote or stood for is more than matched by a frequent desire to pummel him no matter what. I remember watching a panel discussion on a prominent Bengali TV channel two or three years back.

The subject at hand was of the chit fund scams that rocked the state just then.

The BJP spokesperson, a recent convert to the saffron world-view, was speaking just after a left-wing leader had had his say. He began by declaiming that "since Marx, from whom the Indian left draws its inspiration, died more than 150 years ago, it is pointless to engage with the left."

A gentle reminder that his timelines were somewhat awry provoked a sharper response: the gentleman couldn't care less if Marx had lived a hundred or a thousand years ago—for, one way or another, he was evil.

Surely the BJP *karyakarta* was in august company. During the 136 years that it has stood inside London's Highgate Cemetery, the many benedictions that Marx's grave has received from solicitous hands make for a fascinating story. People have splashed emulsion paint of sundry colours over the tomb. The Swastika has made its appearance upon the memorial with unflinching regularity. Marx's massive head has remained an inviting target for hammer-wielders.

As recently as in February, 2019, the memorial plaque (bearing the names of the members of the Marx family who lie buried here) was vandalised so meticulously that the trust looking after the tomb feels that the monument may never be the

same again.

Connoisseurs also pasted loving messages reading 'Doctrine of Hate', 'Bolshevik Holocaust' and 'Architect of Genocide' on the pedestal, taking care to write only in red, presumably Marx's favourite colour. An exasperated Maxwell Blowfield, from the British Museum, said he was "just surprised that somebody in 2019 feels they need to go and do something like that."

Ian Dungavell, CEO, Friends of Highgate Cemetery Trust, had a somewhat different take on the incident: "That's the only consolation—he [Marx] has not been forgotten about."

Now, both the visceral hatred of the man as well as the wide-eyed curiosity about what he was all about give the lie to what was once believed to be a settled fact: that Karl Marx was no longer worth bothering about; that, indeed, there was no point trying to rescue him from the no-man's land of history to which the dismantling of the USSR (and the 'socialist camp') had consigned him to.

I will in fact argue that, as much as the renewed interest in his work, the animosity towards him derives from a realisation that the central core of Marxism—even his political economy—has not dated, never mind that Marx didn't live to see either of the two World Wars, or the Cold War, or the 1930s' Great Depression, or its later equivalent—

the great financial sector earthquakes of 2008–09 whose tremors are yet to run their course fully.

Marx was well and truly back on the public scene when, on September 19, 2008, the Financial Times of London ran that unnerving headline—*Capitalism in Convulsion: Toxic Assets head towards the Public Balance Sheet*. It was the time when a lot of management-school-trained experts were obliged to recall what Walter Bagehot, the 19th century economist who lived and worked in London in much the same time that Marx did, had said about common sense:

“Common sense teaches that booksellers should not speculate in hops, or bankers in turpentine; that railways should not be promoted by maiden ladies, or canals by beneficed clergymen . . . in the name of common sense, let there be common sense.”

As an over-leveraged global financial system continued to unwind, common sense reclaimed—if only for a while—some of the space in the public discourse that jargon-laden sophistry had monopolised since the disappearance, in the 1990s, of all competing visions of public finance. The foremost of those visions—more accurately, of the ways of looking at the economic organisation of human society—was Karl Marx’s critique of capitalism. A look back to that critique was inescapable in the circumstances, at any rate for those who, like George Soros, had begun to hear the roll of thunder some time before the storm hit home with unspeakable fury.

For them, the meltdown of 2008–09 was clearly a throwback, through the Asian financial turmoil of 1997–98, to capitalism’s existential crisis of the tumultuous 1930s. In

the US alone, 9 million women and men lost their jobs during 2007–09, pushing the national unemployed number to 10% of the labour force. The crisis wiped out nearly one whole year’s national output from the country’s balance sheet, with aggregate household net worth plunging \$16 trillion, or 24%. Only a self-deluding observer could deny that there was more than a grain of truth in what Marx had to say on the subject as early as in 1848:

It is enough to mention the commercial crises that by their periodical return put the existence of the entire bourgeois society on trial, each time more threateningly. In these crises, a great part not only of the existing products, but also of the previously created productive forces, are periodically destroyed. In these crises, there breaks out an epidemic that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity . . .

For those in Europe and the US—and even in countries that managed to escape the direct fallout of the crisis—whose very lives were coming apart even as capital and debt markets were unravelling at breathless speed, Marx’s ringing indictment of globalised capitalism couldn’t but have struck a chord:

Modern bourgeois society, with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells. . . . The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them (the productive forces at the disposal of that society).

Relentlessly, Marx pursues this theme of the self-destructive force

built into the process of capitalist development:

And how does the bourgeoisie get over these crises? On the one hand, by the enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones. That is to say, by paving the way for more extensive and more destructive crises, and by diminishing the means whereby crises are prevented.

As powerful as the image of the necromancer struggling to put the genie back into the bottle is, it need not blind us to the broader point that is being made here. Capitalist growth inevitably leads to disruption and crisis, but the system reinvents itself after every such upheaval—by conquering new markets and deepening the exploitation of existing ones.

The price that every new incarnation extracts from society escalates in each cycle, but what Schumpeter called the unending process of ‘creative destruction’ rolls on regardless. The capitalist system lives to see another day. How?

The answer that Marx provides to this question remains one of the most brilliant insights that any economist/philosopher brought to his craft in any period of recorded history. Here is Marx’s reply, in its bare essentials:

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of Reactionists, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are

dislodged by new industries . . . that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed not only at home but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations. . . . The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication . . . compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production . . . In other words, it creates a world after its own image.

Marx believed that this process would eventually lead to an enormously concentrated political economy. He also believed that this concentration was bound to assume such humongous proportions that, beyond a point, the system could no longer reinvent itself. It would then founder under its own weight—helped, as Marx had hoped, by “the grave-diggers of capitalism”—the class of the industrial proletariat, the impoverished manual wage-earner who, in Marx’s England of the 1840s, lived at best a sub-human life.

It was this idea, of capitalism being the last stage in a process of social evolution based on implacable class antagonisms, that became the point of departure for all major political revolutions of the 20th century. The most significant among these was the Russian (Bolshevik) Revolution of October/November 1917 which happened to stake

its claim as the ‘real’ inheritor of Marx’s legacy. When the USSR, into which this revolution had resulted, collapsed in a heap in the 1990s, popular imagination saw this as the unravelling of Marxist political economy itself.

Liberal scholarship has always lent credence to this gross oversimplification and, for neoliberal orthodoxy, such an equation is an article of faith. From the late 1990s till the market mayhem of 2008–09, therefore, Marx the political economist was cited more often for rebuttal than for any meaningful engagement with his ideas. This, despite the fact that everybody agreed, however grudgingly, that Marx’s contributions to the social sciences, historiography, aesthetics and philosophy were seminal.

It took the tectonic shift in fundamental economic thinking caused by the 2008 crisis for the world to once again recognise, with Eric Hobsbawm, that,

“we cannot foresee the solutions of the problems facing the world in the twenty-first century, but if they are to have a chance of success they must ask Marx’s questions, even if they do not wish to accept his various disciples’ answers.”

(Anjan Basu is a literary critic, commentator and translator of poetry. He is based in Bangalore.)

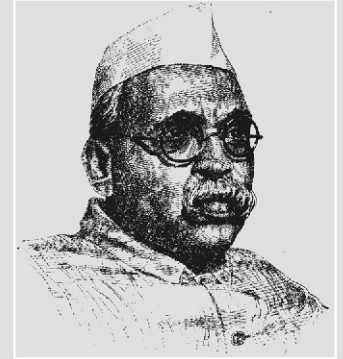
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Modinomics = Falsonomics: Part I

Neeraj Jain

Prime Minister Modi has often claimed that the Indian economy during the past five years of his rule has transformed from one of world's most fragile economies to the fastest growing economy in the world. Echoing him, the Finance Minister claimed in his 2019 budget speech: "We are the fastest growing major economy in the world with an annual average GDP growth during last five years higher than the growth achieved by any Government since economic reforms began in 1991."

This claim has an interesting history. For that, let us go back five years.

Government Moves to New Base Year

In January 2015, the government moved to a new base year of 2011-12 from the earlier base year of 2004-05 for national accounts. The government's Central Statistical Office (CSO) announced that not only was the base year for all calculations being revised, the methodology for calculating the GDP was also being changed.

This somewhat magically allowed the Central Statistics Office (CSO) to up the GDP growth rate by 2 percentage points. This made

India—not China—the world's fastest major economy, and the Narendra Modi government lapped up the accolades. There were rumblings of disbelief as the uptick did not match any other real indicators. Even the government's chief economic advisor, Arvind Subramanian, admitted that he is puzzled and mystified by the revised estimates based on a new methodology.¹ Yet, the CSO released another set of estimates the following year (2016), further upping the growth rate figures for the BJP years (See Table 1).²

Now, there is fundamentally nothing wrong with re-basing the GDP; this is periodically done. But each time the GDP is rebased, the "back series" are also released immediately, going back to at least a decade or more. This time, what was bewildering was that not only did the CSO not publish the GDP growth figures for the years prior to 2011-12, the demand was ignored for three years!³

Finally, in July 2018, the Committee on Real Sector Statistics under the Chairmanship of Dr. Sudipto Mundle set up by the National Statistical Commission (NSC) submitted its report to

Table 1: India: GDP Growth Rate after Methodology Change in 2015

	<i>GDP Growth rate, New Series (2011-12 base), 2015 estimate (constant prices)</i>	<i>GDP Growth rate, New Series (2011-12 base), 2016 estimate (constant prices)</i>
2012–13	5.1	5.6
2013–14	6.9	6.6
2014–15	7.4	7.2
2015–16		7.6

the NSC in which it presented its estimates of GDP back series based on the new methodology. The report showed that economic growth during the UPA years exceeded the old figures. The series showed that during the UPA regime, growth had exceeded 10% not once, but twice. The average growth rate during the UPA years had been upped from 7.5% in the old series to 8.0 in the new series (See Table 2).⁴

What most rankled the GOI was that these growth rate figures during the UPA years made the growth during the BJP years lower than the UPA years! The growth rate during the first three years of BJP rule so far had been 7.4%, 8.2% and 7.1%⁵, for an average of 7.6%, and not once had the economy exceeded 10% growth rate. As if this was not enough, the economy had been slowing down in 2017–18.⁶ So, the government promptly labelled the Mundle Committee data as “experimental” and “not official estimates”;⁷ the report of the NSC Committee was swiftly removed from the website—this was something unprecedented, as the NSC is the apex body regarding statistical matters and is supposed to be autonomous;⁸ and the CSO burnt the midnight oil to come up with a new GDP back series. On November 28, 2018, the government finally released its new, official,

back-series estimates for India's GDP (See Table 2). The figures show a lower rate of growth during the UPA years between 2005–06 and 2011–12 than what was estimated using the previous methodology. The data was released by NITI-Aayog vice-chairman Rajiv Kumar—when actually the NITI Aayog has nothing to do with computation of GDP figures, and the data should have been released by the CSO. Clearly, the NITI-Aayog had helped the CSO massage the GDP figures. Former Chief Statistician of India was forthright in his condemnation of the involvement of the NITI-Aayog in the release of the GDP back series: “We have always had a system that data CSO brings out is completely removed from the political interference. Even the Prime Minister would get to know of the numbers just before they are released. Now to do that alongside NITI Aayog, which is a political institution like the (previous) Planning Commission was, is essentially diluting the integrity of the CSO.” He went on to add, ““It’s a clear shift that NITI Aayog got involved in the generation of the new series. One gets the suspicion that it was not done by professional statisticians.”⁹

And then, wonder of wonders, just a day before the Modi Government released its last budget

for the current term, the CSO further bumped up the growth rate data for the years 2016–17 (the year of demonetisation) and 2017–18 (the year of GST) to show that growth for these two years was even higher than earlier projected. The government now claimed that in 2017–18, the GDP grew at 7.2 per cent, 50 basis points higher than the 6.7 per cent estimated earlier; and for 2016–17, the economic growth grew at 8.2 per cent from 7.2 per cent estimated earlier (See Table 2 & Chart 1).

There are several simple tests that the two new series released in 2018 and 2019 fail:

i) First, a simple common sense argument. The consensus view is that the economy was already losing steam by the first quarter of 2016-17 and demonetisation in November 2016 intensified the slow-down. There are various ground reports on the significant pain and job losses in the informal sector. But the new official estimate claims that India grew the fastest since 2011–12 in the year of demonetisation! The growth during this year (that is, 2016–17) at 8.2% is now even higher than the boom year of 2007–8, which now stands downgraded from 9.8% to 7.7%. That is simply unbelievable!

ii) Anyway, let us leave aside this common sense argument. As mentioned above, there is

Table 2: GDP and GDP Growth Rates, New and Old Series, Constant Prices¹⁰

	<i>GDP Growth rate, Old Series (2004-05 base) (constant prices)</i>	<i>GDP Growth rate, NSC Committee estimates, June 2018 (constant prices)</i>	<i>GDP Growth rate, New Series (2011-12 base) , 2018 estimates (constant prices)</i>	<i>GDP Growth rate, New Series (2011-12 base) 2019 estimates (constant prices)</i>
UPA Years				
2004–05	7.9	8.2		
2005–06	9.3	9.6	7.9	
2006–07	9.3	9.7	8.1	
2007–08	9.8	10.2	7.7	
2008–09	3.9	4.2	3.1	
2009–10	8.5	8.8	7.9	
2010–11	10.3	10.8	8.5	
2011–12	6.6	7.0	5.2	
2012–13	4.7	5.5	5.5	
2013–14	5.0	6.4	6.4	
Average: 2005–06 to 2013–14	7.5	8.0	6.7	
BJP Years				
2014–15			7.4	7.4
2015–16			8.2	8.0
2016–17			7.1	8.2
2017–18			6.7	7.2
Average: 2014–15 to 2017–18			7.35	7.7

fundamentally nothing wrong with re-basing the GDP. GDP is re-based regularly to account for changing production structure, relative prices and better recording of economic activities. Crucially, the re-basing also allows for introducing newer methodologies and improved databases. Such changes often expand the absolute GDP size because we are able to more accurately capture output. However, rarely, if ever, does the growth rate of GDP (or of its sectors)

differ markedly between the new and the old series – implying that the underlying pace of economic expansion has remained the same.¹¹

But what is intriguing with the new series is:

- In the new series first released in 2015, the GDP at factor cost for the base year (2011–12) at current prices is smaller by 2.2% as compared to that in the older series—when, normally, the GDP should expand as normally happens with rebasing

as explained above:

- Old series: GDP at factor cost in 2011–12 (at current prices) = Rs 83,91,691 crore.
- New series (as per National Accounts Statistics of 2015): GDP at factor cost in 2011–12 (at current prices) = Rs 82,06,398 crore.
- As if that was not enough, the revised data released by the CSO in January 2016 further lowered the GDP for 2011–12:

- 2016 data: GVA at basic prices in the base year 2011–12 (at current prices) = Rs 81,06,656 crore.
- 2015 data: GVA at basic prices in base year 2011–12 (at current prices) = Rs 81,95,546 crore.

[That is: it was now 3.4% lower as compared to the older series (not a very accurate comparison, as we are comparing it to GDP at factor cost of the old series, Rs 83,91,691 crore)! (For definitions, see Box)]¹²

This downward revision in GDP figures for 2011–12 raises India's growth rates in the following years. Thus, for 2013–14:

- The old series put the annual GDP growth rate at 4.7%.
- This has gone up to 6.6% in the new series.

iii) Even more strange is the fact that for some components of the GDP, that is, for some sectors, even the direction of change is different. For instance, for 2013–14,

manufacturing sector growth rate has moved from (–) 0.7% in the old series, to (+) 5.3% in the new series. Such drastic revision of industrial growth rates are difficult to believe, as the revised (higher) estimates were quite at variance with other macroeconomic correlates, such as bank credit growth, or industrial capacity utilisation, or new investment projects launched.

iv) Agricultural growth rates at constant prices were much higher from 2004–05 to 2013–14 than since then. During the five years of the Modi government, agriculture GDP growth was 2.9 per cent on an average, compared to 4.3 per cent during the UPA-II years, and 3.7 per cent for the full 10 years of UPA. This is based on the latest GDP estimates released by the CSO, and is despite the manipulation of GDP data by the Modi Government.¹³

v) Another intriguing fact is: During the UPA years, when according to the new series GDP growth

was lower, the gross investment rate—defined as gross fixed capital formation over GDP—peaked at 35.6% in 2007 and averaged 33.4% during the UPA period (2004–05 to 2013–14). Subsequently, during the four years of Modi-led NDA-II government, when according to the new series growth was higher, the gross investment to GDP ratio declined to a low of 28.5% in 2017 and averaged around 29% during the NDA period (2014–15 to 2017–18) (See Chart 2).

Economic theory has always held that higher investments lead to higher GDP. So how can GDP grow faster when the investment-to-GDP ratio has fallen?

Technically, the only circumstance in which this can happen is when the economy's productivity or the 'Incremental Capital Output Ratio' (ICOR) improves equally dramatically. Simply put, it means the economy generates a lot more output for the same amount of capital employed. There is no sign of that happening during the Modi government's four years in which productivity was in fact negatively impacted by the twin shocks of demonetisation and messy GST implementation. Besides this, much of the NDA-II period has also seen the largest quantum ever of unproductive assets locked up in the form of non-performing assets (NPAs). Banks are not lending because of unresolved bad loans. How can productivity surge in such circumstances?¹⁵

vi) The figures under the new series don't match any of the other economic numbers. Thus, even while the UPA-era growth is supposed to be lower according to the new series:

- during the UPA years, non-food bank credit (outstanding) grew

Box: Some Definitions

In the older series, the CSO used to measure the economy's growth in terms of the changes in real GDP at factor cost.

- GDP at factor cost = Sum of GVA originating from various economic activities such as agriculture, mining, quarrying, manufacturing and so on.
- GDP at Factor Cost + net indirect taxes (indirect taxes minus subsidies) = GDP at market price.

In the NAS new series, CSO introduced a new concept:

- GVA at basic prices = GDP at factor cost + net production taxes (indirect taxes on production minus subsidies on production). (Since subsidies are higher, GDP at factor cost is usually more than GVA at basic prices.)
- GVA at basic price + net indirect taxes on products (indirect tax on products minus subsidies on products) = GDP at market prices. (This, at constant prices, is considered to be the GDP used by us in budget calculations.)

In loose terms, GDP at factor cost in the old series can be taken equivalent to GVA at basic prices in the new series, as the GDP at Factor Cost data is not easily available for the years after 2011–12.

Chart 1: GDP Growth Rates, Constant Prices, Old and New Series

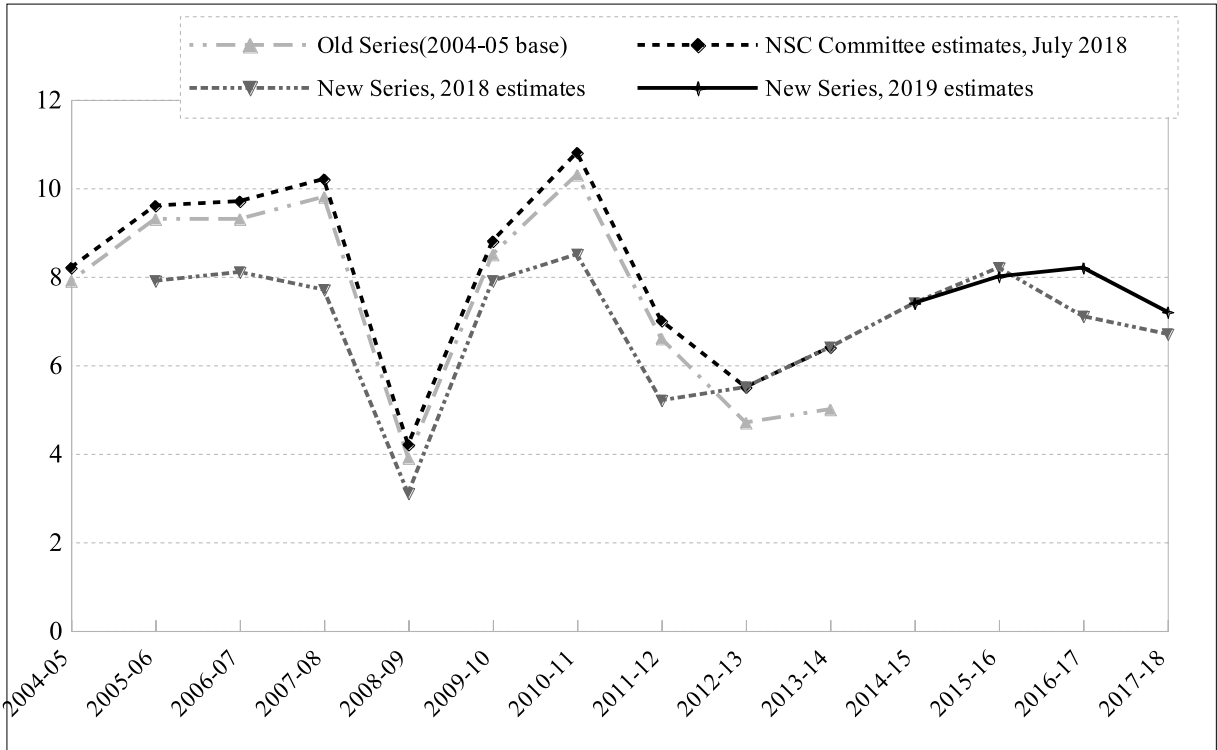
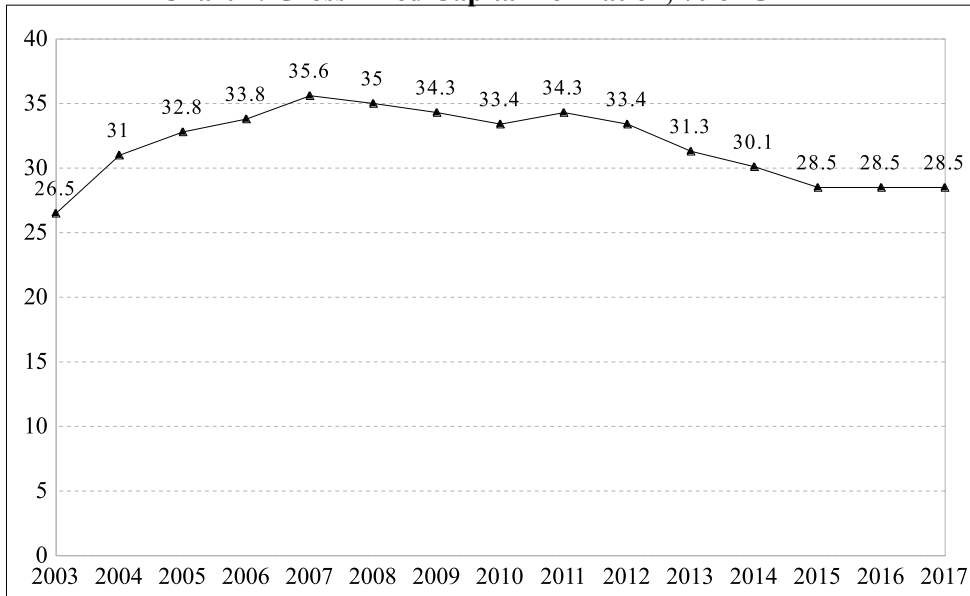


Chart 2: Gross Fixed Capital Formation, % of GDP¹⁴



at a creditable rate of 22.8%, while bank credit to industry (outstanding) grew even faster at 23.3%.

- while under the NDA years, non-food bank credit (outstanding) rose by an average of 8.6%, while bank credit to industry

(outstanding) grew at a lowly 1.8%—a clear indication of a slow-down.

vii) Likewise, several other economic numbers also do not match.

During the UPA years, the country's exports were booming at

20%-plus. But during the BJP years, export growth was zero: India's total merchandise exports – from industrial to agricultural goods (service exports are excluded in this analysis) – actually fell during the first four years of Modi govt (2014–15 to 2017–18) by (– 0.4%),

whereas they had grown by 22.16% during the UPA-I regime, and 12.3% during the UPA-II regime.¹⁷

In absolute numbers, exports were only \$50 billion in 2002–03, but had risen to \$250 billion in 2010–11, and reached \$315 billion in 2013–14. They have not recovered to that level even in 2017–18—when they were \$303 billion.

Similarly,

- UPA years: corporate earnings of the top 1,100 companies grew at over 20%.
- BJP years: corporate earnings of the top 1100 companies grew at about 2% a year.¹⁸

viii) Yet more figures comparing UPA with BJP economic performance:

- Corporate revenues grew by 18.9 per cent annually and company profits by 13.2 per cent on an average per year during 2005–14, compared to just 5.2 per cent for revenues and a decline of 1.8 per cent for profits during 2014–18.
- Capital expenditure was growing at 20.8 per cent per year in the earlier period, and it fell to 8.7 per cent later.
- Corporate tax, which was

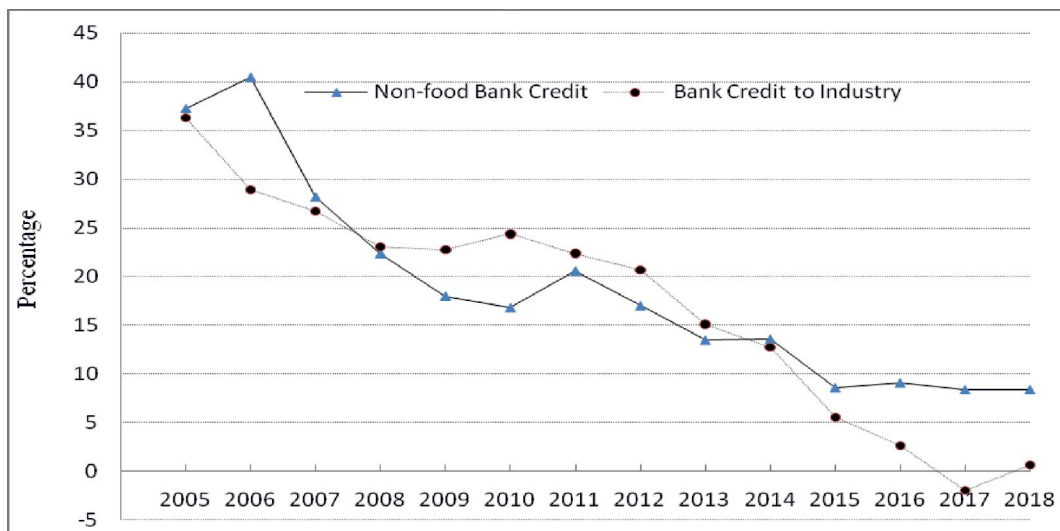
growing at 21.5 per cent, fell to a growth of just 10 per cent, showing a clear slowdown in the economy.

- Plant load factor (PLF, or the ratio of actual energy produced to maximum possible energy that could have been produced) averaged 68.5% from 2004–05 to 2013–14, and until 2011 had never fallen below 74%. By contrast, the PLF from 2014–15 to 2017–18 has been 57%.
- Industrial performance can be judged by vehicle sales. They are a good barometer of GDP growth because they indicate consumption demand. Also, the automotive industry has a long value chain reaching back to primary activity such as mining (basic metals), manufacturing (plastics, leather, forgings, electronics, glass) and forward to the service sector, including areas such as finance, advertising and marketing. The industry also supports a vast number of jobs in repair, maintenance and energy sectors. So, what does the data say? Car sales went up by an average of 13.8 per cent per year

in the earlier period, truck sales were up 14.3 per cent annually, while in the 2014–18 period car sales growth had slumped to 1.1 per cent and for trucks to 0.9 per cent. Since the auto and truck sector is central to the health of the economy, with ancillary industries down the line, their dismal performance indicates that the economy is doing poorly all around.¹⁹

ix) The roots of the problem probably lie in the methodological changes made to make the new GDP series. For example, data from the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) was replaced with Ministry of Corporate Sector's (MCA's) company financial data (MCA-21) for estimating manufacturing sector growth. (In the older series, the manufacturing sector consisted of two parts: registered (or organised) sector accounting for about two-thirds of manufacturing output, estimated using Annual Survey of Industries (ASI); and unregistered (or unorganised) manufacturing, whose output was estimated using various NSS sample surveys.) It has been shown by several experts

Chart 3: Growth Rate of Bank Non-Food Credit and Industrial Credit¹⁶



that MCA database has several shortcomings, and the advantage claimed by CSO in using MCA over ASI data—that ASI data leaves out non-factory value addition—has also been shown to be false.²⁰ The use of MCA data in place of ASI data is one reason which has led to faster manufacturing sector growth and faster GDP growth in the new series. Several analysts have questioned this and other changes in the methodology made by the CSO to draw up the new series.²¹

Economy Slowing Down Again

Despite all these machinations, the slowdown simply won't go away. The latest GDP growth figures released by the CSO show that the economy is slowing down once again. The GDP growth rate for the first three quarters of 2018–19 was 8%, 7% and 6.3%, with third quarter—October to December, 2018—was down to 6.6% year-on-year, the slowest in five quarters. Even these estimates are most probably inflated. An article by Devangshu Datta in scroll.in gives several data available in the public domain that indicate that the economy has slowed more than the official estimates show.²² But then how GDP data has been suitably massaged over the past five years, it shouldn't be surprising if the CSO bumps up 2018–19 growth rate too!

Real GDP Growth Rate Close to 1 Percent

The government claims that the rate of growth of the economy is around 7%. Even if we leave aside the above debate about how the government has manipulated GDP figures, even then, this growth rate is a huge exaggeration. As has been shown by Arun Kumar, the

real growth rate of the economy is not 7% as is being claimed by the government, but is closer to 1%.

The reason for this is that post demonetisation and GST, the unorganised sector has been badly devastated. Thus, a recent survey by the All India Manufacturers' Organisation revealed that two years after demonetisation and GST, the economy has not yet recovered from its blows. The survey, based on data from 34,700 of the AIMO's 300,000 member units and conducted in October 2018, showed that the number of jobs in micro and small enterprises had declined by roughly a third since 2014. In medium-scale enterprises, about a quarter of jobs had been lost, and among traders the decline was over 40 percent.²³ Data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, a business-intelligence firm, shows a loss of 11 million jobs in 2017, most of them in the largely unorganised rural economy. But government figures do not take into consideration this devastation, and estimate the GDP contribution of the unorganised sector as if everything was normal.

The government collects data on growth in the unorganised sector once every five years. The last time it did this was in 2015. In the years between successive datasets, official numbers for the unorganised sector are calculated on the basis of various assumptions. For example, there are projections based on figures from the preceding year, and on data on the organised sector—on the assumptions that old trends persist, and that the organised and unorganised sectors share similar fortunes. These assumptions are valid if the economy does not face a structural break.

Such assumptions do not hold anymore. Demonetisation hurt the organised sector much less than the unorganised sector, since the latter is far more dependent on cash. The GST has also had a disproportionate impact on unorganised enterprises, even though they are exempted from registering for it. GST compliance in the organised sector has forced the digitisation of business transactions, and a preference for organised-sector suppliers. The informal sector has struggled to deal with the reconfigured complexities and priorities, and so lost lucrative contacts with the organised sector. In the wake of these shocks, the organised sector can no longer serve as a proxy for the unorganised sector, and old numbers have no connection to the new reality.

Worse, the official method used to calculate the government's quarterly growth estimates is based only on data from the corporate sector. These do not even fully represent the organised sector, since the corporate sector is only one part of it. Further, if the organised sector is growing at the expense of the unorganised sector, as seems to be the case, then the former cannot at all represent the latter.

All of this implies that the economy's rate of growth is nowhere close to what the government claims it is. If we take the official word for this, the organised sector, which accounts for 55 percent of gross domestic product, is growing at 7 percent; and agriculture, which is part of the unorganised sector and accounts for about 14 percent of GDP, is growing at around 3 percent. For the non-agricultural unorganised sector, which accounts for the remaining 31 percent of GDP, the scale of job losses shown

in the studies cited above points to a decline of at least 10 percent, even by a conservative estimate. If all this is added up proportionately, the overall rate of growth only comes to around 1 percent. This is the true measure of the growth of the Indian economy, post-demonetisation and post-GST.²⁴

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Is India's Democracy Being Sold Through Electoral Bonds?

In response to the petition filed by Communist Party of India (Marxist) General Secretary Sitaram Yechury before the Supreme Court with regards to the electoral bonds, the BJP-led central government said in an affidavit that the decision to issue electoral bonds would promote transparency in funding and donations received by political parties.

Interestingly, the BJP was the biggest beneficiary of the electoral bond scheme launched by the government in 2017-18, bagging 94.5% of the bonds worth a little over Rs 210 crore. The BJP's audit and income tax reports submitted to the Election Commission of India (ECI) list voluntary contribution of "Rs 210,00,02,000 through electoral bonds", *Economic Times* review of the party's annual audit report for 2017-18 shows.

Electoral reforms activists, former chief election commissioners, and constitutional experts have slammed this move for obfuscating transparency rather than enhancing it. It would make political funding, especially by corporations, more opaque as neither the donors nor the parties have to reveal who donated what to which party. That itself violates the constitutional principle of free and fair elections.

Spending on the election ending May 23 is set to rise 40 per cent to 500 billion rupees (\$7 billion), according to the New Delhi-based Centre for Media Studies. "It won't be an exaggeration to say that our elections will never be the same again," said N. Bhaskara Rao, the group's chairman, who has advised previous Indian governments. "What is this if not the auctioning of our

democracy to the highest-paying corporation?" he said.

What are electoral bonds

Anyone can buy an electoral bond at the government-owned State Bank of India in denominations ranging from 1,000 rupees to 10 million rupees (\$14 to \$140,000). Afterwards, they are delivered to a political party, which can exchange them for cash. They don't carry the name of the donor and are exempt from tax. SBI is the only bank that is authorised to issue such bonds.

As per the provisions of the scheme, electoral bonds may be purchased by a person, who is a citizen of India or entities incorporated or established in India, including foreign companies. A person can buy electoral bonds, either singly or jointly, with other individuals.

Electoral bonds are available for a period of 10 days each in the months of January, April, July and October, with an additional period of 30 days specified by the central government in the year of general elections.

The bonds can be purchased only after making payment through KYC-compliant account. They can be encashed by an eligible political party only through a designated bank account with the authorised bank.

An electoral bond is valid for 15 days from the date of issue. No payment would be made to any payee political party if the bond is deposited after the expiry of the validity period. The bond deposited by any eligible political party into its account would be credited on the same day.

Any party that is registered under section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, and has secured

not less than 1% of the votes polled in the last election of the Lok Sabha or legislative assembly will be eligible to receive electoral bonds.

No opposition to overhaul

"India's campaign finance overhaul began in 2017, when parliament approved an amendment that made it easier for companies to donate to campaigns, including removing a cap on corporate donations (the maximum used to be 7.5 per cent of a company's average net profits over three years). Now new firms can also donate to political parties, opening the door for shell companies to be set up expressly for the purpose," TNIE reported.

Requirements for companies to disclose how much they donated and to which party were also eliminated.

The changes were introduced in parliament via a money bill, a measure that only needs to be passed by the lower house controlled by Modi's ruling coalition and not the opposition-led upper house.

A similar tactic was used to pass with little debate rules that changed the definition of a foreign company. Previously, all subsidiaries of international entities were treated as overseas donors and not allowed to make political contributions. Now if a foreign firm has a stake of less than 50 per cent in a company operating in India, that unit can fund Indian elections.

While several lawmakers protested the moves, analysts said the amendments will benefit both Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party as well as the main opposition Congress party. It was said that nobody from the opposition spoke up because they too could gain if they came to power.

Experts unanimously slam move

This wide leeway to corporates have drawn the ire of Jagdeep Chhokar, founder-member of the Delhi-based civil rights organisation Association of Democratic Reforms and a long-time crusader for electoral reforms. It was because of his petition in the PIL against Finance Bill unduly favouring corporations in political funding, that the Supreme Court issued a notice to the central government and Election Commission.

Chhokar insisted that the government at the Centre is “hoodwinking the public and electorate”, because although political parties would have to show the amount of political funding in their balance sheet, they do not have to disclose to which party they have donated, Newslick reported.

If the donation is made to the ruling government, the electorate would have no way of knowing the extent of crony capitalism because the party in power would obviously “reward” major and significant donors with government contracts, licenses and tenders. Moreover, the government in power would get detailed information on which the corporation has donated what amount, and can thus arm twist those who have funded its rivals more, he said in the report.

S.Y. Quraishi, a former chief election commissioner echoed Chhokar in the report. He agreed about the apprehension of potential arm twisting by the powers-that-be. He said that the electoral bonds are the exact antithesis of transparency. The bonds will ensure the anonymity of donors, but “also kill whatever little transparency that exists now.” He further said, “The removal of

the ceiling of 7.5% of a company’s profits that could be donated has compounded the problem. Very soon we will see companies spending all their profits on politics alone and control governments. So far, all donations above Rs 20,000 are disclosed by political parties to the Election Commission. In future, no one will know which corporation donated how much and to which party. And the inevitable quid pro quo will never be apparent.”

Nasim Zaidi, ex-chief election commissioner who retired in July last year has also voiced his misgivings about the government not consulting the EC before introducing electoral bonds though that was mandated by law, and also stated that because of

electoral bonds, corporations would never file the donations they made to political parties, thereby trampling on the people’s fundamental right to know.

Legal scholar Gautam Bhatia has explained why these bonds are a threat to democracy, while Suhrith Parthasarathy, a lawyer practising in the Madras High Court, has detailed how they reward corruption, the report said.

The mounting criticism is apparent and the bonds are under immense scrutiny considering the nearing Lok Sabha elections. Will it be the country’s democracy that sizzles on this political self-serving hot plate?

Courtesy: Sabrang India

Gender Audit of the Union Budget 2019–20

Vibhuti Patel

Introduction

Women and girls face various forms of vulnerability throughout the life cycle. They may face discrimination before or after birth; violence, harassment or abuse; neglect due to dependence and lack of access to resources; social prejudice; and exploitation—whether economic, political, social or religious. They are vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination regardless of where they are positioned on the economic and social spectrum. Additionally, their vulnerability increases significantly if they are poor, socially disadvantaged or live in a backward or remote area. Gender Responsive Budget (GRB) is a widely accepted strategy that has been employed across more than 100 countries to

address these vulnerabilities.

GRB uses the Budget as an entry point to apply a gender lens to the entire policy process. It is concerned with gender sensitive formulation of legislation, policies, plans, programmes and schemes; allocation and collection of resources; implementation and execution; monitoring, review, audit and impact assessment of programmes and schemes; and follow-up corrective action to address gender disparities. GRB is not just a one-time activity. It is a continuous process that must be applied to all levels and stages of the policy process. The idea behind GRB is not about literally dividing funds in a fifty-fifty ratio among men and women. GRB is about bringing a gender perspective in policy making at different levels. For

example, recent schemes like Digital India are noteworthy but lack specific focus on digital empowerment of girls and women given the gender inequality in society. At grass root level, often women with low or no literacy levels are left out in technological shifts which become important part of daily life in society. Likewise, there is scope to integrate safety of women as a major concern in flagship centrally sponsored schemes such as JawaharLal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), PMGSY, etc. While undertaking town planning, policy makers and budget experts need to do gender budgeting to ensure women-friendly civic infrastructure—water, sanitation, health care, safe transport, public toilets, help lines, skill development for crisis management and, safe transport and safety at work place.

In brief, it needs to be recognised that women's issues do not have to be seen as the concerns of the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) and Social Welfare (SW) Departments alone. There is a need to recognise that women are contributors to and recipients of services provided by different departments like Health, Education, Home, Tribal, Public Works, RDD, Housing, Social Justice, etc. and that they have different needs. Policies have to be thus designed and financed accordingly to create maximum benefits to all.

Institutionalisation of Gender Budgeting

The first important step towards institutionalisation of gender budgeting would be to ensure that a policy guideline or mandate is not only issued from the highest level of the government but also implemented by the concerned ministries and

departments. Formation of a high level committee chaired by the Chief Secretary or the Additional Chief Secretary rank official will also be crucial to ensure that mechanisms are put in place to operationalise gender budgeting. All state governments need to create a gender cell, preferably within the finance and planning department to ensure that budgets are effectively reaching women and girls. Akin to environmental impact assessment, the format for approval of new programmes and schemes needs to include a section on gender to ensure that the design of the scheme is gender sensitive. All departments must include a section on gender in their annual reports and outcome budgets. Concerted efforts need to be made to ensure that sex disaggregated is collected. Wherever needed, the monitoring formats should be revised to collect the data. Women's Policy should have a clear action plan with roles and responsibilities and timeline delineated for relevant ministries/ departments.

Translation of Gender Commitments to Budgetary Commitments

Gender promises made by the state gets translated into gender responsive budgetary commitments of the Union ministries and departments. Like previous years, the Gender Budget Statement (GBS) for the year 2019–20, in its Part A has provided schemes and programmes 100% targeted for women and Part B gives the schemes that are expected to use minimum of 30 per cent of the total allocation for women and girls. The GBS is significant as it is the only source of verifiable, quantitative information on government's efforts at ensuring budgetary commitments

towards women. The overall financial allocation for the GBS for 2019–20 (BE) is Rs 1,31,700 crore while the same for 2018–19 (BE) was Rs 1,24,367 crore. Thus there is an increase of Rs 7,333 crores in the current budget.

Decline in Allocation for Gender Concerns

When it comes to gender responsive budget, there is continuous decline since 2017–18. The actual expenditure of the Union Budget for Part A, that is schemes 100% targeted at women, was Rs 28,644 crore in 2018–19, while the Revised Budget for 2018–19 got reduced to Rs 26,544 crore, and the current year's allocation is Rs 26,504 crore. Thus the allocation of PART A has consistently declined.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) budget has got nearly 1/5 rise in its budgetary allocation in the current budget.

Gender based Violence

Since 2018–19, there has been a decline in the budgetary provision for schemes addressing violence against women. The current budget has increased financial allocation for only one scheme *One Stop*. Financial support for shelter homes for women survivors of violence, *Swadhar Greh* and *Ujjawala* scheme for prevention, rescue and rehabilitation of trafficked girls and women has reduced by half as compared to the previous year. The Helpline for women in distress has been reduced by more than 1/3 as compared to the previous year. The promise of a Scheme for Acid Attack Victim's Welfare Fund and Restorative Justice to Rape Victims has remained only on paper even when as per National Crimes Records Bureau, the nature, intensity and

gravity of crime against girls and women are escalating day by day.

The allocation for Government's flagship scheme *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* is stagnant. Utilisation of the Nirbhaya Fund has been miserably poor.

Women and Work

There has been drastic reduction of work participation of women over the last 5 years across educational backgrounds and location; yet no scheme is provided for enhancement of women in the workforce. There has been reduction in financial allocation for Scheme for National Mission for Empowerment of Women from Rs 267 crore in 2018–19 (BE) to Rs 150 crore in 2019–20 (BE). Fund allocation for Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP) is miniscule, and even this has further declined from Rs 5 crore in 2018–19 (BE) to Rs 3 crore in 2019–20 (BE).

Women in Agriculture

As per NSSO 68th Round, 80% of women workers were in the agrarian sector. There has been feminisation of agriculture as men are migrating to the cities to earn cash income. But women are not recognised as farmers as women do not have land-holding in their names and cannot access all schemes for farmers. Only *Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana* under the National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM) has a provision for women Farmers' component under *Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana*. But the most important challenge is to get an official recognition as 'women farmers', only then can women farmers access credit and get all agriculture related entitlements under 30% women's component

in *Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana*, Sub-Mission on Agriculture Mechanisation, National Food Security Mission, National Mission on Oilseeds and Oil Palm, Sub-Mission on Seed and Planting Material and Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare. Likewise, women are not eligible for the income guarantee scheme of Rs 6,000 per annum under the Prime Minister *Kisan Samman Yojana* for farmers owning less than 2 hectares of land announced in the Interim Budget, as women do not own land.

Gender Audit of Welfare Schemes

Budgetary provisions for crèche scheme for working parents' children has dropped. The financial allocation under *Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana* (PMMVY) of Rs 2,500 crore in 2019–20 (BE) is highly inadequate to meet the medical expenditure of over half a million pregnant women in India. Moreover, inadequate number of *Anganwadi* workers under ICDS and helpers and *ASHA workers* of National Health Mission render them inhumanly overburdened. Reduction in social sector budget for maternal health, employment, violence against women, practical gender needs in the care economy in the context of lowering of real wages due to food price inflation and informalisation of workforce has made toiling women's lives precarious. Announcement of policy for social security and social protection of domestic workers on March 5, 2018 by the Labour Ministry has not been translated in terms of budgetary allocation in 2019–20 (BE).

GoI has approved a new scheme,

Mahila Shakti Kendra (subsuming erstwhile National Mission for Empowerment of Women Scheme) for implementation during 2017–18 up to 2019–20 to empower rural women through community participation. Due to mass movement of women farmers, the current budget has made some promises, but without any doable agenda.

One Step Forward, Two Steps Backwards

The current budget has promised 50 per cent increase in the honorarium of *Anganwadi* workers, but even after this increase, the long-standing demand of minimum wage of Rs 18,000 per month will not be met. The financial provision for the Scheme for Transgender Persons under Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has been negligible and mostly unutilised. The same is the story of the fund for relief and rehabilitation of rape victims. There is a need for enhancement in allocation for special funds for the survivors of Acid Attack for their medical treatment and reconstructive surgeries. The most neglected sections under the Union Budget 2019–20 are the girls from SC, ST and minority religious communities. The Right to Pee campaign has highlighted need for mass construction of rest rooms for girls and women in public places such as bus stations, railway platforms, market places, tourist spots, public schools and colleges, and industrial zones, allocation for which needs to be made from 30% component gender budget component of sanitary budget, but no progress is made due to resistance of the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation to implement GRB.

Human rights organisations,

transgender groups and women's studies centers need to work proactively to ensure gender responsive participatory budgeting at all levels of governance.

Conclusion

The Gender Budget Cells that are supposed to serve as focal points for coordinating gender budgeting initiatives within their Ministries and across Departments have played a major role in budgetary allocations of the Union Budget. So far 56 Ministries / Departments have confirmed setting up of a cell and / or nominating a nodal person. This could materialise because the Ministry of Women and Child Development, in collaboration with UN Women, developed a Manual and Handbook for Gender Budgeting for Gender Budget Cells for Central Ministries and Departments. This strategy of the Government on Gender Budgeting and Gender Mainstreaming during 2004 to 2014 resulted in many State Governments like Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Orissa, Kerala, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Tripura, Nagaland, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand adopting Gender Budgeting.

Gender economists are aware that concerns of women cannot be addressed through the Ministry of Women and Child Development alone. It is on the work of women that success of several sectors rest. The changing demographics of agriculture, with more than 75% of all women workers, women's disproportionately large contribution to the export and services sector and in the unorganised sectors—all these need to be located in our policies. Each of these sectors needs to make concerted efforts to

address women's concerns through: recognising women's contributions, addressing their gender specific concerns and organising their voice; investing in skills of women and upgrading their work spaces and providing common work facilities; providing women access to new technologies and credit schemes; paying special attention to caste and minority derived exclusion within gender. Hence, it is important to prioritise universalisation of Gender budgeting (including gender audit) and Gender outcome assessment in all Ministries / Departments at Central and State levels. The Gender Budget Cells located in the different ministries need to be strengthened so that women's concerns can be mainstreamed across different sectors. Further, it needs to be ensured that each of such measures (as listed above) is backed with adequate resource allocation. Calling for implementation of the Women Component Plan (WCP) across all ministries could ensure at least a minimum resource allocation targeted at women. The poor and even receding implementation of WCP as pointed by the Mid-Term Appraisal of the Tenth Plan warrants special efforts at correction. Considering the large numbers of women in unpaid work and women's central role in the care economy, to address women's concerns in these sectors, policies need to focus on social services to support women's care roles (old age, child care). With increasing women's role in the care economy (both paid and unpaid), adequate resource allocations need to be made to support women's care roles. In the absence of sex disaggregated data, evaluation of schemes through a gender lens or any effort at strengthening gender

dimensions of existing schemes poses a big question. So, provision of such data should be prioritised. In the light of the present agrarian crisis and the changing face of agriculture being highly gendered, the vulnerability of women farmers in particular needs attention in the larger context of food security.

Considering the huge gender disparities in land ownership patterns, women's access to land needs to be strengthened immediately. This could be done by (a) improving women's claims to family land (by enhancing legal awareness on inheritance laws, provide legal support services, etc.); (b) improving access to public land by ensuring that all land transfers for poverty alleviation, resettlement schemes, etc., recognise women's claims; etc., (c) Improving women's access to land via market through provision of subsidised credit to poor, by encouraging group formation for land purchase or lease by poor women, etc.,

Women's rights organisations in India have demanded that the government should ensure adequate gender budgeting in all ministries and departments, enact a comprehensive Food Security Bill, ensure universal PDS as a core component, allocate 6% of GDP for health, allocate 6% of GDP for education, make budgetary allocation to cover special schemes for women workers, increase allocation for women farmers, enhance resource allocation for tribal, Dalit and minority women and increase budgetary support for schemes to assist women-headed households and differently abled women. The target of 30% gender allocations under all ministries has not yet been achieved. This must be implemented immediately.

There is need for gender audit and gender outcome appraisal of all ministries and departments at the central and state levels. Very often, resource allocations made under

gender budgeting do not reach in time and they remain unspent. There should be proper monitoring and supervision of the allocated funds with greater transparency and

accountability at all levels.

(Vibhuti Patel teaches at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.)

In Ex-Colonial Countries, People Should Stop Admiring the US and Europe

Andre Vltchek

It may sound incredible, but it is true: in countries that have been damaged, even totally robbed and destroyed by the West, many people are still enamoured with Europe and North America.

For years, I have been observing this ‘phenomena’, even in the most plundered, devastated war zones and slums. Often I was shocked, other times thoroughly desperate. I did not know how to respond, how to react, how to describe what I have been observing.

Then, a few days ago, in Syria, right next to the Idlib battlefield, close to the deadly positions of Al-Nusra Front, in a country where the West and its allies have murdered hundreds of thousands of people, one of my interpreters exclaimed in a ‘patriotic’ outburst: “Look how beautiful this land is! It is almost as beautiful as Europe!”

And at night, another guide of mine began nostalgically recalling his glorious days in Europe, when he could still go there; before the Syrian war began.

An interpreter did not know who Fidel Castro was (I had his portrait, lighting up cigar, as my phone screensaver), but both of them—my local companions at the battle ground—were fluent in Western slang and the worldview. They knew,

however, near zero about China. They were patriotic and they fully supported their country, but at the same time they admired the West and Western journalists from the mainstream media—those very same propagandists who helped to bring their beautiful and unique Syria to the state in which it is now.

It all felt schizophrenic, but definitely not new.

I could not take it, anymore. I decided to write this story, despite the fact that it is an intellectual ‘minefield’. I decided to write it, because it is how it is. Because I have to tell it; someone has to. And above all, because it is absolutely essential to combat the crooked selfie image with which the West has been infecting almost all nations of the world, including all those that it has been plundering and raping.

I

Are we dealing with the so-called “Stockholm Syndrome” here? Most likely, yes. The victim falls in love with her or his tormentor.

For long centuries, the West has been colonising, usurping, literally terrorising the entire planet. Hundreds of millions have died as a result of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and imperialism. Wealth, cultural and educational

institutions, hospitals, transportation, parks—all that Europe and North America possess to date and boast about—was constructed on mountains of bones, on genocide and unbridled plunder.

That cannot be disputed, can it?

Slavery, mass murder, genocidal expansions; the West robbed the world, and then consolidated its power, promoting its exceptionalism through relentless brainwashing (called ‘education’), propaganda (called ‘information’), and twisted entertainment for the masses that inhabit poor countries (called ‘culture’ and ‘the arts’).

Shockingly and absurdly, Europe and North America are still loved and admired by many, even (or especially) in such places where Western governments and companies plagued everything like locusts, leaving to the locals only burned land, poison and miserable slums.

How is it possible?

For years, I have been working in Africa, a continent which was entirely subjugated by the UK, France, Germany, Belgium and other European expansionist nations. Africa, from where millions of men, women and children were brought in chains to the “New World”, as slaves. Where millions died during

the ‘hunt’, where millions died in ‘transit centers’, and then, on the open seas. That’s tens of millions of ruined lives. The complete plunder of the resources, the unimaginable humiliation of the people, broken cultures, genocides and holocaust against local individuals from what is now Namibia to the Democratic Republic of Congo. Great African heroes like Lumumba assassinated by the Western rulers.

And yet, many Africans see the West as some great ‘example’, as a ‘guiding light’, as a severe but respectable ‘daddy’, who uses the belt when it is necessary, but who also rewards justly those of his ‘children’ who ‘behave properly’.

It is repulsive, but undeniable.

The greatest African writers are now teaching at US and UK universities. They have been ‘neutralised’ and ‘pacified’, many of them outrightly bought. In many countries, African judges wear comical white wigs, doing their best to look like their British counterparts. The children of corrupt elites are collecting diplomas from the UK and French universities, imitating upper-class European accents.

To behave, to look and sound like the colonisers, is something that brings respect.

The same on the Sub-Continent, of course.

The mannerism among the upper classes in India and Pakistan are those of the UK (and lately, of the US). Elites there go out of their way to be more British than the Brits; more Californian than the inhabitants of the US West Coast. Countless private Indian universities call themselves ‘American’ or ‘British’, with ‘Oxford’ or ‘Cambridge’ frequently ‘decorating’ their names.

‘To be accepted’ in Europe

or North America is the highest honour in almost all former colonies, therefore, in almost the entire world.

‘Well-groomed’, well-educated and modern Asians, Latin Americans, Africans and the Middle Easterners are expected to ape Westerners; to dress like Westerners, eat (and drink) like the Westerners and to ‘defend the same values’ as them.

In fact, they are expected to be much more Western than the Westerners.

But ‘expected’ by whom? Yes, you guess correctly: very often by their own people!

II

Ask and many in the ‘South’ will tell you: everything that comes from the West is beautiful, progressive and dandy.

“Every bule is beautiful,” I was informed, recently, by a young indigenous professional lady in the totally environmentally plundered island of Borneo/Kalimantan. Bule is a vulgar, derogatory Indonesian word for the ‘whites’, and literally means ‘albino’. However, the lady was not joking, it was a compliment: she was brought up believing that every bule is actually superior and fine-looking.

In the indigenous Mexican state of Yucatan, right after the elections that brought to power the left-wing President Obrador, I overheard the conversation of a dozen or so upper-class housewives in a Western chain café. Their references were fully European and North American: from vacations in Italy and Spain, to the films they were watching, books they were reading; Europe was their ‘mother-continent’, while Miami their only true comparison. Before Obrador came to power, indigenous people were increasingly living

in misery, their roofs broken, jobs disappearing. But the elites were, as always, in a European state of mind. The real Mexico was not on their radar. It did not matter, or didn’t even exist.

Even some of the poor in the ‘conquered world’, who are actually ‘concerned’ about Western imperialism, see it as an abstract problem. They see it as a strictly political, military or economic issue. The fact that Western imperialism has ‘culturally’ immobilised entire nations and continents is hardly addressed.

Even in those proud countries that are determinedly struggling against Western imperialism—China, Russia, Iran, or Venezuela—the Western narrative of exceptionalism has already managed to cause tremendous damage.

In China, for instance, almost everything ‘Western’ had been, until recently, associated with modernity. Being ‘against the West’ was considered boring, gray and outdated, somehow connected to the ‘Communist propaganda’ of the past (the fact that the ‘Communist propaganda’ was often correct, mattered nothing). This attitude allowed the great infiltration of Chinese universities by Western academia, as well as the injection of Western nihilism into Chinese arts, culture, even way of life. Only recently, has this dangerous trend been reversed, but not after it had already caused great damage.

The admiration of everything Western destroyed the greatest progressive experiment of modern history—the Soviet Union and the so-called “Eastern Bloc”.

The power of negative Western propaganda packaged together with the promotion of extreme

individualism, selfishness and consumerism literally wiped out all internationalist zeal, humanism and higher principles from the minds of tens of millions of young Czechs, Poles, East Germans, Bulgarians and even Soviets.

The once proud Communist Eastern Bloc, after liberating dozens of countries from colonialism, after fighting for an egalitarian world, showing solidarity with all oppressed nations, was then gradually defeated by such shallow bullshit as blue jeans labels, the nonsensical lyrics of rock and pop songs (a favorite weapon of the West), greed, religions (another Western weapon), and slogans like 'freedom' and 'democracy' (the Western world which has been denying freedom and democracy to almost all countries on our planet, cynically turned the truth upside down and fooled East Europeans, by skillfully applying centuries long propaganda methods).

In the end, confused and increasingly cynical, what many East Europeans demanded was not 'freedom', but more money, more labels, and the ability to join the bloc of the countries that have been plundering the world.

III

So, what makes the West so successful, when it comes to brainwashing people all around the world? How is it possible, after all that banditry, terror and ruthlessness, that most of the oppressed and conquered countries are still showing plenty of respect to the masters that reside in New York, London or Paris?

I believe that if we find the answers to this question, we will be able to save the world and reverse

this deadly trend.

First of all, after interacting with thousands of people in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Oceania and Latin America, I am coming to the conclusion that the West (and Japan) is often admired for the 'high standards of living'.

In such miserable and collapsed countries like Indonesia, I often hear nonsense like: "European countries are more 'Muslim' than we are. They treat people much better than we do."

Middle and upper class Southeast Asian families travel to Netherlands or Germany, and then exclaim after returning home: "Look at their parks, hospitals, bicycle lanes, trams, museums . . . We have to learn from them! They do so much for improving our world."

That's precisely what Africans admire about Europe. That's how many 'educated' Indians or Southeast Asians feel. That's what Peruvians, Hondurans or Paraguayans love about their Miami.

Are they wrong? Isn't there, after all, plenty that poor countries could learn from the West?

Yes; definitely they are wrong. Totally wrong!

Let's see 'why'?

The West 'arranged' the entire world in accordance with its own feudal system of the past centuries. It brought the system of shameless oppressive regime to the global level.

To admire this monstrous and regressive global system would be like admiring the arrangement of European societies some three hundred years ago. It would be essentially like saying: "Look, the aristocracy of France or England was actually quite fine, egalitarian, educated and healthy, and we should

learn from how they lived, and copy their examples!"

Of course, the aristocracy, the royalty and the church of Europe has always lived well, even 300 years ago. They had good schools for their children, they had decent medical care, palaces, summer villas, sanatoriums with mineral waters, theatres, lavish parks and tons of servants.

The only 'tiny' problem was that some 95% of the population had to work for the luxury they enjoyed, subsisting in total misery. Plus, of course, those tens of millions of un-people in the colonies were being exterminated like animals.

The same is happening now. The entire Europe (with the exception of the poor people there) has moved to the bracket of new aristocracy, at least comparatively. And the rest of the world is labouring, dying, being raped and plundered, in order to maintain this 'wonderful-looking' social-state project of the West. Even the US and its relatively brutal turbo-capitalist model is still 'socialist' (for the US citizens), compared to such countries as Indonesia, India, Peru or Nigeria.

Western standards of living cannot be replicated elsewhere. To believe that the West would allow Africans or Southeast Asians to build a social state is naïve, almost intellectually insulting. Singapore, South Korea and Japan are rare exceptions, where the West closed both eyes, for strictly strategic reasons.

In order for the West to prosper, maintaining a super high standard of living, with all the benefits for its citizens, billions of the 'serfs' all over the world have to suffer, sacrifice themselves, and work for close to nothing; the more of them

that live in hell, the better.

Nature has to be plundered in places like Borneo and Papua, DR Congo and soon in Brazil.

People have to be ruled by pro-Western corrupt oligarchs, and by the military and religious leaders. Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and now Brazil, are perfect countries for the West: they happily and willingly sacrifice their own people, guaranteeing Western prosperity.

You did not know? Nonsense! You did not want to know. All those people who matter are very happy with this arrangement: the Western rulers, citizens of Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand and Japan, as well as the rulers/elites in the poor countries. The only ones who are truly suffering are those billions of the poor, worldwide, but they matter nothing, and they are not told anything anyway, because the media is in the hands of the West and their lackeys, and so is 'education'.

And as they are not told anything, they—the wretched of the Earth—are admiring the West, too. They eat Western junk food if they can save few dollars a month, they drink Nescafe instead of their traditional coffee, listen to the shittiest music, watch pirated Hollywood blockbuster movies, wear fake sneakers and jeans, and masturbate to Western porn (if they have internet). They also dutifully follow religions, which were injected and upheld by the West, into their countries.

The poorer the country, the greater appear to be the green hills and pastures of the Western paradise.

And so it goes, on and on.

IV

Frankly and honestly, I am tired of this status quo. And I don't find

this amusing at all: hearing admiring statements about European and other Western countries in the middle of the monstrous war zones, famine-stricken areas, brutal mines, on the banks of poisoned rivers and inside the slums.

I am an 'old-fashioned' revolutionary. Slaves have to rise and fight, if necessary die for freedom; not to admire their masters and tormentors.

The crimes of the colonialists have to be exposed. The insane arrangement of the world has to be defined and then smashed into pieces.

The cute trams, bicycle lanes, parks, museums, operas, cafes, universities and hospitals in Europe are built on rivers of blood and the

bones of 'The Others'. I said it three years ago on the floor of the Italian Parliament, and I will repeat it again and again, wherever I go.

There is no other topic that matters, right now, on our planet.

Everything is connected to this, including the fear and hate that the West feels and spreads about countries like Venezuela, Russia, China, Iran, South Africa, Syria or Cuba.

They hate us; they hate those who resist, who are standing tall. And they should and will get back the same in return, hopefully, if the truth is pronounced often enough!

(Andre Vltchek is a philosopher, novelist, filmmaker and investigative journalist.)

Weaponising the World Bank and IMF

Whitney Webb

In a leaked military manual on "unconventional warfare" recently highlighted by *WikiLeaks*, the US Army states that major global financial institutions—such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)—are used as unconventional, financial "weapons in times of conflict up to and including large-scale general war," as well as in leveraging "the policies and cooperation of state governments."

The document, officially titled "Field Manual (FM) 3-05.130, Army Special Operations Forces Unconventional Warfare" and originally written in September 2008, was recently highlighted

by *WikiLeaks* on Twitter in light of recent events in Venezuela as well as the years-long, US-led economic siege of that country through sanctions and other means of economic warfare. Though the document has generated new interest in recent days, it had originally been released by *WikiLeaks* in December 2008 and has been described as the military's "regime change handbook."

WikiLeaks' recent tweets on the subject drew attention to a single section of the 248-page-long document, titled "Financial Instrument of US National Power and Unconventional Warfare." This section in particular notes that the US government applies "unilateral and indirect financial power through

persuasive influence to international and domestic financial institutions regarding availability and terms of loans, grants, or other financial assistance to foreign state and nonstate actors,” and specifically names the World Bank, IMF and The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), as well as the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), as “US diplomatic–financial venues to accomplish” such goals.

The manual also touts the “state manipulation of tax and interest rates” along with other “legal and bureaucratic measures” to “open, modify or close financial flows” and further states that the US Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC)—which oversees US sanctions on other nations, like Venezuela—“has a long history of conducting economic warfare valuable to any ARSOF [Army Special Operations Forces] UW [Unconventional Warfare] campaign.”

This section of the manual goes on to note that these financial weapons can be used by the US military to create “financial incentives or disincentives to persuade adversaries, allies and surrogates to modify their behavior at the theater strategic, operational, and tactical levels” and that such unconventional warfare campaigns are highly coordinated with the State Department and the Intelligence Community in determining “which elements of the human terrain in UWOA [Unconventional Warfare Operations Area] are most susceptible to financial engagement.”

The role of these “independent” international financial institutions as extensions of US imperial power is elaborated elsewhere in the manual

and several of these institutions are described in detail in an appendix to the manual titled “The Financial Instrument of National Power.” Notably, the World Bank and the IMF are listed as both Financial Instruments and Diplomatic Instruments of US National Power as well as integral parts of what the manual calls the “current global governance system.”

Furthermore, the manual states that the US military “understand[s] that properly integrated manipulation of economic power can and should be a component of UW,” meaning that these weapons are a regular feature of unconventional warfare campaigns waged by the United States.

Another point of interest is that these financial weapons are largely governed by the National Security Council (NSC), which is currently headed by John Bolton. The document notes that the NSC “has primary responsibility for the integration of the economic and military instruments of national power abroad.”

“Independent” but controlled

Though the unconventional warfare manual is notable for stating so openly that “independent” financial institutions like the World Bank and the IMF are essentially extensions of US government power, analysts have noted for decades that these institutions have consistently pushed US geopolitical goals abroad.

Indeed, the myth of World Bank and IMF “independence” is quickly eroded by merely looking at the structure and funding of each institution. In the case of the World Bank, the institution is located in Washington and the organisation’s president has always

been a US citizen chosen directly by the president of the United States. In the World Bank’s entire history, the institution’s Board of Governors has never rejected Washington’s pick.

This past Monday, it was reported that President Donald Trump nominated former Bear Stearns economist David Malpass to lead the World Bank. Malpass had famously failed to foresee the destruction of his former employer during the 2008 financial crisis and is likely to limit World Bank loans to China and to countries allied or allying with China, given his well-established reputation as a China hawk.

In addition to choosing its president, the US is also the bank’s largest shareholder, making it the only member nation to have veto rights. Indeed, as the leaked unconventional warfare manual notes, “As major decisions require an 85% supermajority, the United States can block any major changes” to World Bank policy or the services it offers. Furthermore, the US Treasury Secretary, former Goldman Sachs banker and “foreclosure king,” Steve Mnuchin, functions as the World Bank’s governor.

Though the IMF is different from the World Bank in several respects, such as its stated mission and focus, it too is largely dominated by US government influence and funding. For instance, the IMF is also based in Washington and the US is the company’s largest shareholder—the largest by far, owning 17.46 percent of the institution—and also pays the largest quota for the institution’s maintenance, paying \$164 billion in IMF financial commitments annually. Though the US does not choose the IMF’s top executive, it uses its privileged position as

the institution's largest funder to control IMF policy by threatening to withhold its IMF funding if the institution does not abide by Washington's demands.

As a consequence of the lopsided influence of the US on these institutions' behavior, these organisations have used their loans and grants to "trap" nations in debt and have imposed "structural adjustment" programs on these debt-saddled governments that result in the mass privatisation of state assets, deregulation, and austerity that routinely benefit foreign corporations over local economies. Frequently, these very institutions—by pressuring countries to deregulate their financial sector and through corrupt dealings with state actors—bring about the very economic problems that they then swoop in to "fix."

Guaidó hits up IMF

Given the close relationship between the US government and these international financial institutions, it should come as little surprise that—in Venezuela—the US-backed "interim president" Juan Guaidó—has already requested IMF funds, and thus IMF-controlled debt, to fund his parallel government.

This is highly significant because it shows that top among Guaidó's objectives, in addition to privatising Venezuela's massive oil reserves, is to again shackle the country to the US-controlled debt machine.

As the Grayzone Project recently noted:

Venezuela's previous elected socialist president, Hugo Chávez, broke ties with the IMF and World Bank, which he noted were "dominated by US imperialism." Instead

Venezuela and other left-wing governments in Latin America worked together to co-found the Bank of the South, as a counterbalance to the IMF and World Bank."

However, Venezuela is far from the only country in Latin America being targeted by these financial weapons masquerading as "independent" financial institutions. For instance, Ecuador—whose current president has sought to bring the country back into Washington's good graces—has gone so far as to conduct an "audit" of its asylum of journalist and *WikiLeaks* publisher Julian Assange in order to win a \$10 billion bailout from the IMF. Ecuador granted Assange asylum in 2012 and the US has fervently sought his extradition for still sealed charges ever since.

In addition, last July, the US threatened Ecuador with "punishing trade measures" if it introduced a measure at the UN to support breastfeeding over infant formula, in a move that stunned the international community but laid bare the willingness of the US government to use "economic weapons" against Latin American nations.

Beyond Ecuador, other recent targets of massive IMF and World Bank "warfare" include Argentina, which awarded the largest IMF bailout loan in history just last year. That loan package was, unsurprisingly, heavily pushed by the US, according to a statement from Treasury Secretary Mnuchin released last year. Notably, the IMF was instrumental in causing the complete collapse of the Argentinian economy in 2001, sending a poor omen for last year's approval of the

record loan package.

Though it was released over a decade ago, this "US coup manual" recently highlighted by *WikiLeaks* serves as a salient reminder that the so-called "independence" of these financial institutions is an illusion and that they are among the many "financial weapons" regularly used by the US government to bend countries to its will and even overthrow US-disfavored governments.

(Whitney Webb is a Chile-based staff writer for MintPress News and has contributed to several other independent, alternative outlets.)

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