

frontier

Vol. 56 : Nos. 17-20

October 22-November 18, 2023

Price : Rs. 50

Celebrating 55 years of frontier

Founder-Editor : SAMAR SEN

Autumn Number 2023

Mass Rebellion, No Revolution-3 • First International and its Contemporary Relevance by Marcello Musto-4 • Bishnu Dey and Das Kapital by Asok Chattopadhyay • Preparation of the 1947 Draft of the Programme of the CPSU(B) by Vijay Singh-8 • Marxism, Capitalism and Democracy by Arup Baisya-12 • Ascendancy of Capitalism in China by Harsh Thakor-16 • Markets and Democracy: A Brewing Crisis by Anup Sinha-18 • South Asia in Crisis by Sushil Khanna-23 • Revamping Indian Agriculture by I Satya Sundaram-28 • Gopal Sen: the Murder of a Vice-Chancellor by Amit Bhattacharya-32 • The Future of the War in Ukraine by Sumanta Banerjee-40 • Hindutva Sleeping Cell in Congress by Shamsul Islam-43 • Of Lay-offs and Retrenchment by Nityananda Ghosh-45 • Modi's Statecraft by Himanshu Roy-47 • India's DNA by Ashok Nag-50 • How Muslim Ghettos Emerged in Twentieth-century Calcutta by Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay-53 • Early Communist Activism in Kolkata by Farooque Chowdhury-60 • Communalism, Fundamentalism and Obscurantism by Aloke Mukherjee-65 • A Discourse on 'Riot Politics' in Gujarat by Arup Kumar Sen-67 • Cooperatives: Dream and Reality by Sukanta Sarkar-68 • World Lacks Any Credible Institutional Capacity to Deal with Climate Change by Vinod Mubayi-74 • Parallel Economy Continues to Flourish by Manas Bakshi-77 • A Poet against Fascism by A C-79 • Why Not Uniform Economic Code? by Ranganayakamma-81 • Sedition Law-a British Legacy by I M Sharma-82 • Back Story of Covid-19-Pandemic or Plandemic? by Pranjali Bandhu-85 • Bhagat Singh in Canada by Chaman Lal-90 • Political Economy of Speed Rail in Kerala by KT Rammohan-94 • Continuing Decline of Bengal Economy by Atanu Chakravarty-97 • D D Kosambi Research Foundation by Kobad Ghandy-100 • Ranajit Guha, Subaltern School and Anthropology in India by Abhijit Guha-102 • Jaduguda Uranium Mining Cluster by Bernard D'Mello-108 • Climate Change, Peak Oil, Inequality by Sagar Dhara-112 • Transition Town Movement by T Vijayendra-119 • Condition of Prisons and Prisoners by Aurobindo Ghose-124 • Boris Kagarlitsky in New 'Gulag' by K M Seethi-129

Editor : TIMIR BASU

Assistant Editor : Subhasis Mukherjee

Published weekly for Germinal Publications Pvt. Ltd. by Sharmistha Dutta from 44, Balaram Dey Street, Kolkata-700006 and Printed by her at LASER AID, 35A/3, Biplabi Barin Ghosh Sarani, Kolkata-700067 E-mail : frontierweekly@yahoo.co.in / frontierweekly@hotmail.com • Website : www.frontierweekly.com

Telephone : (033) 2530-0065

[Typeset by THE D-COMLASER, 60 Sikdar Bagan Street, Kolkata-700004, Phone : 98361-58319]

Mass Rebellion, No Revolution

THIS IS THE ERA OF MASS PROTESTS. AND YET SOCIAL REVOLUTIONS AS HISTORY predicted them in the twentieth century are nowhere found. What goes in the name of revolution in some parts of the world is actually counter-revolution led by right-wingers. How rightists are getting increased support from masses, more precisely toiling masses, both in advanced and backward countries, is a matter of serious concern in recent years. After the collapse of USSR socialism is a 'dirty word' and socialist state is equated with dictatorship. Communists are portrayed as fascists. Socialist revolution is being increasingly evaluated as an impossibility. The dream of social revolution seems further out of reach now than at any moment since its emergence in the eighteenth century.

Mass protests aimed at toppling governments, rather repressive and autocratic governments, have swept the planet like a prairie fire. The list of countries that have witnessed mass upsurge in the recent past is formidable. Algeria, Brazil, Chile, Egypt, France, Hong Kong, Iraq, Russia, Serbia, South Africa, Sudan and Ukraine among others. In the 1920s the Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter and Occupy Wall Street Movement shook the world as millions of people in numerous countries stood in solidarity with them. The impact of all these mass mobilisations didn't last long. Nor did they bring in any radical change in social structure.

Each of these protest movements brought masses of people into the streets. Sometimes they even brought down government or drove a dictator into exile. In many cases they helped rightist reactionaries return with more brutal oppressive machine. As a result least successful mass revolts had to face massive repression and white terror, reversing the limited gains movements succeeded to achieve. Only recently people in Egypt observed the 10th anniversary of Rabba massacre, one of the worst massacres of protesters in modern history. Human Rights Watch documented at least 900 protesters killed in Rabba. To compare, estimates suggest about 1000 were killed in Tiananmen Square.

For one thing, most of these mass upheavals were city-centric, involving mainly educated middle class people. In India the ruling elites have popularised the term 'urban naxal'. And these mass upsurges are described as 'urban civic revolutions' with limited goals to reach. The basic character of all these mass mobilisations is the same: 'they tend to leave the stage of history just as quickly as they take to it'. Nobody now talks about 'Occupy Wall Street'. Nor does Arab Spring attract Arabs to cry for more 'Arab Springs'.

Of all these rebellions in recent years, Iranian Revolution, rather Iranian Islamic Revolution, was very powerful. But ultimately autocracy was replaced by mullahcracy which is out and out reactionary and anti-people. It's a dictatorship of fundamentalists. No basic change in society. It's more like a situation of 'back to square one'. People are now protesting against hijab and moral policing.

Nearer home farmers' year-long agitation against regressive farm laws was historic in scope and spread as well. Peasants took to the streets and came to Delhi. It was not really urban-centric mass protest but it finally took the character of urban-oriented mass mobilisation. The movement succeeded in generating solidarity support across the country. It halted the government's anti-farmer measures for the time being. A kind of stalemate prevails and it doesn't mean they have won the final battle. The government is just buying time.

The city-centric mass revolts with sporadic violent incidents, are peaceful protests though revolution is basically an armed insurrection. Revolution is defined and redefined variously at different junctures of history. Revolution is a structured phenomenon. "A revolution is about citizens seizing back control over a regime through mass mobilisation from below". That was Leon Trotsky who formulated it against the backdrop of political developments in Russia.

The world is changing very fast. And change is hard. Old formulations are getting quickly outdated while appropriate new formulations are not emerging. But the basic question of revolution remains the same: how to mobilise masses, oppressed masses, in their millions against the system that oppresses them. □□□

POLEMICS

First International and its Contemporary Relevance

Marcello Musto

AFTER ITS FIRST MEETING, on September 28, 1864, the International Working Men's Association (better known as the "First International") quickly aroused passions all over Europe. It made class solidarity a shared ideal and inspired large numbers of women and men to struggle against exploitation. Thanks to its activity, workers were able to gain a clearer understanding of the mechanisms of the capitalist mode of production, to become more aware of their own strength, and to develop new, more advanced forms of struggle for their rights.

When it was founded, the central driving force of the International was British trade unionism, the leaders of which were mainly interested in economic questions. They fought to improve the workers' conditions, but without calling capitalism into question. Hence, they conceived the International primarily as an instrument to prevent the import of manpower from abroad in the event of strikes. The second group in importance of the International were the mutualists, long dominant in France. In keeping with the theories of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, they opposed any working-class involvement in politics, and the strike as a weapon of struggle. Then there were the Communists, opposing the existing system of production and espousing the necessity of political action to overthrow it. At its founding the ranks of the International also included a number of workers inspired by utopian theories, and exiles having vaguely

democratic ideas and cross-class conception who considered the International as an instrument for the issuing of general appeals for the liberation of oppressed peoples. Therefore, in the beginning, the International was an organisation in which coexisted different political traditions and in which the majority of them were reformist and not revolutionary.

Securing the cohabitation of all these currents in the International, around a programme so distant from the approaches with which each had started out, was Karl Marx's greatest political accomplishment. His political talents enabled him to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable. It was Marx who gave a clear purpose to the International, and who achieved a non-exclusionary, yet firmly working class-based, political programme that won it mass support beyond sectarianism. Marx was the political soul of its General Council (the body that worked out a unifying synthesis of the various tendencies and issued guidelines for the organisation as a whole), he drafted all its main resolutions and prepared almost all its congress reports.

Nevertheless, despite the impression later created by the Soviet Union's propaganda, this organisation was much more than a single individual, even one as brilliant as Marx. It was a vast social and political movement for the emancipation of the working classes; not, as it has often been written, the "creation of Marx". The International was made possible first of all by the labour movement's struggles

in the 1860s. One of its basic rules—and the fundamental distinction from previous labour organisations—was "that the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves". The view that Marx mechanically applied to the stage of history a political theory already forged in the confines of his study is divorced from the historical reality. Marx was essential to the International, but also the International had a very positive impact on Marx. Being directly involved in workers' struggles, Marx was stimulated to develop and sometimes revise his ideas, to put old certainties up for discussion and ask himself new questions, and to sharpen his critique of capitalism by drawing the broad outlines of a communist society.

Theories and Struggles

The late Sixties and early Seventies in the 19th century were a period rife with social conflicts in Europe. Many workers who took part in protest actions decided to make contact with the International, whose reputation quickly spread widely. From 1866 on, strikes intensified in many countries and formed the core of a new and important wave of mobilisations. The International was essential in struggles that were won by workers in France, Belgium and Switzerland. The scenario was the same in many of these conflicts: workers in other countries raised funds in support of the strikers and agreed not to accept work that would have turned them into industrial mercenaries. As a result, the bosses were forced to compromise on many of the strikers' demands. These advances were greatly favoured by the diffusion of newspapers that either sympathised with the ideas of the International or were veritable organs of the General Council. Both contributed to

the development of class consciousness and rapid circulation of news concerning the activity of the International.

Across Europe, the Association developed an efficient organisational structure and increased the number of its members (150,000 at the peak moment). For all the difficulties bound up with a diversity of nationalities, languages and political cultures, the International managed to achieve unity and coordination across a wide range of organisations and spontaneous struggles. Its greatest merit was to demonstrate the crucial importance of class solidarity and international cooperation.

The International was the locus of some of the most famous debates of the labour movement, such as that on *communism* or *anarchy*. The congresses of the International were also where, for the first time, a major transnational organisation came to decisions about crucial issues, which had been discussed before its foundation, that subsequently became strategic points in the political programmes of socialist movements across the world. Among these are: the indispensable function of trade unions; the socialisation of land and means of production; the importance of participating in elections, and doing this through independent parties of the working class; women's emancipation; and the conception of war as an inevitable product of the capitalist system.

The International also spread outside Europe. On the other side of the Atlantic immigrants who had arrived in recent years began to establish the first sections of the International in the United States of America. However, the organisation suffered from two handicaps at birth that it would never overcome. Despite repeated exhortations from the General Council in London, it was

unable either to cut across the nationalist character of its various affiliated groups or to draw in workers born in the "New World". When the German, French and Czech sections founded the Central Committee of the International for North America, in December 1870, it was unique in the history of the International in having only "foreign-born" members. The most striking aspect of this anomaly was that the International in the United States never disposed of an English-language press organ. At the beginning of the 1870s, the International reached a total of 50 sections with a combined membership of 4000, but this was still only a tiny proportion of the American industrial workforce of more than two million.

Peak and Crisis

The most significant moment of the International coincided with the Paris Commune. In March 1871, after the end of Franco-Prussian War, the workers of Paris rose against the new government of Adolphe Thiers and took power in the city. Henceforth, the International was at the centre of the storm, and gained enormous notoriety. For capitalists and the middle classes, it represented a great threat to the established order, whereas for workers it fuelled hopes for a world without exploitation and injustice. The labour movement had an enormous vitality and that was apparent everywhere. Newspapers linked to the International increased in both number and overall sales. The insurrection of Paris fortified the workers' movement, impelling it to adopt more radical positions and to intensify its militancy. Once again in history, France showed that revolution was possible, clarifying its goal to be building a society different from that of capitalism, but also that, to achieve this, the workers would have to create durable and

well-organised forms of political association. The next step to take then, as stated by Marx, was understanding that "the economic movement of the working class and its political action are indissolubly united". That led the International, at the London Conference of 1871, to push for the foundation of a key instrument of the modern workers' movement: the political party—although it should be stressed that the understanding of this was much broader than that adopted by communist organisations after the October Revolution.

When the International dissolved itself after The Hague Congress of 1872, it was a very different organisation from what it had been at the time of its foundation: reformists no longer constituted the bulk of the organisation and anti-capitalism had become the political line of the whole Association (including new tendencies like the anarchists led by Mikhail Bakunin). The wider picture, too, was radically different. The unification of Germany in 1871 confirmed the onset of a new age, with the nation-state the central form of political, legal and territorial identity.

The initial configuration of the International thus became outmoded, just as its original mission came to an end. The task was no longer preparing for and organising Europe-wide support for strikes, nor calling congresses proclaiming the usefulness of trade unions or the need to socialise the land and the means of production. Such themes were now part of the collective heri-

Our next issue of
frontier
will be that of
November 1–25, 2023

tage of the organisation. After the Paris Commune, the real challenge for the workers' movement became how to organise to end the capitalist mode of production and overthrow the institutions of the bourgeois world.

Internationalism: Then and Today

The rediscovery of the importance of the First International takes place in a very different context. An abyss separates the hopes of those times from the mistrust so characteristic of our own, the antisystemic spirit and solidarity of the age of the International from the ideological subordination and individualism of a world reshaped by neoliberal competition and privatisation.

The world of labour has suffered an epochal defeat and the left is still in the midst of a deep crisis. After a long period of neoliberal policies, the system against which workers fought, and had won important victories, has returned to conditions of exploitation similar to those of the 19th century. Labour

market "reforms"—a term that has changed its original progressive meaning—that have introduced year after year more "flexibility" and easier termination of workers, have created deeper inequalities. Other major political and economic shifts have succeeded one another, after the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Among them there have been the social changes generated by globalisation, the ecological disasters produced by the present mode of production, the growing gulf between the wealthy exploitative few and the huge impoverished majority, one of the biggest economic crises of capitalism (the one erupted in 2008) in history, the blustery winds of war, racism and chauvinism, and, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a context such as this class solidarity is all the more indispensable. It was Marx himself who emphasised that the confrontation among workers, including that between the native proletarians and the foreign ones (who are moreover

discriminated), is an essential element of the domination of the ruling classes. New ways of organising social conflict, political parties and trade unions must certainly be reinvented, as one cannot reproduce schemes used more than 150 years ago. But the old lesson of the International that workers are defeated if they do not organise a common front of the exploited is still *valid*. Without that, the only scenario we have before us is a horizon of war between the poor and unbridled competition between individuals.

Today's barbarism of the "world order" imposes upon the contemporary workers' movement the urgent need to reorganise itself on the basis of two key characteristics of the International: the multiplicity of its structure and radicalism in objectives. The aims of the organisation founded in London, in 1864, are today more timely than ever. To rise to the challenges of the present, however, the new International cannot evade that twin requirements of pluralism and anti-capitalism. □□□

'100 YEARS LATER'

Bishnu Dey and Das Kapital

Asok Chattopadhyay

"There is an old story about Marx: You throw him out the front door and he sneaks back in through the rear window".

In the West the discourse on 'Marx Revival' gets currency every now and then. Since the 2008 capitalist meltdown globally this has been a popular theme in academic circles. "Very Interesting—we thought that the man died, eternally buried with the fall of Berlin Wall! But very quickly he came back with new force".

Every age discovers its own Marx. In the 100th year of DAS KAPITAL Bishnu Dey wrote an extra-ordinary poem on Marx's 'capital' • 'one hundred years'. The poem is in Bishnu Dey's Bengali Collection 'Kabita Samagra'. It was 1967. The world has changed a lot since then. The dreams of 1967 are mostly dead.

BISHNU DEY (JULY 18, 1909–December 3, 1982) was one of the five renowned poets in Bengal in the forties of the last century. He came in contact with the Communist Party of India (CPI) and was encouraged to practise the party programme. Hiren

Mukherjee, a stalwart of the then CPI, continually enthused Bishnu Dey to stay on the party line in the cultural arena. And Bishnu Dey, not being a party member, clung to the party shade in spite of bitter criticism oozed from the party mandarins and often being branded as a

Trotskyite. Trotsky is a perennial villain in Indian communist culture. But Bishnu Dey kept himself attached to Marxism in his own way of thinking and practice in the field of art and literature.

From 1939 Bishnu Dey differed from the CPI on many issues. He was not in agreement with the party line. His thinking and practice clashed with the party lords. He had to undergo humiliation, insult and many a stigma, but he did never agree to deviate from his stand. For one thing he brought Samar Sen, the then rising poet and the undaunted journalist in his later years, to the Progressive Writers' Association. Despite his close contact with the then CPI leaders, Samar Sen, too, did not join CPI. He also remained faithful to Marxism through-

out his life dauntlessly against many an odd.

Bishnu Dey dared party line practitioners and heightened the flag of his rebellious journey. He said: 'Dialectical Materialism cannot be taken as occasional dose of medicine or used simply as a system of prophesy.' However he did never part with the CPI and remained in the periphery of the party till his last days of life.

Despite being denounced repeatedly by his fellow travellers in the party, he never lost his faith in Marxism.

Naturally Bishnu Dey did not get due prestige he deserved from the CPI. Rather he was left in oblivion. This Bishnu Dey wrote a poem on Karl Marx's 'Capital' in its centenary year in Bengali entitled 'ekso bachor pore' (on July 17, 1967) and even translated it into English which is much more interesting though this poem remained almost unschooled, untutored in the Marxist or left camp. The first volume of Marx's Capital (*Das Kapital*) came out on September 14, 1867 while Marx was alive. The renowned historian Gareth Stedman Jones has commented:

'What is extraordinary about Das Kapital is that it offers a still-unrivalled picture of the dynamism of capitalism and its transformation of societies on a global scale. It firmly embedded concepts such as commodity and capital in the lexicon. And it highlights some of the vulnerabilities of capitalism, including its unsettling disruption of states and political systems. [...] If Das Kapital has now emerged as one of the great landmarks of nineteenth-century thought, it is [because it connects] critical analysis of the economy of his time with its historical roots. In doing so, he inaugurated a debate about how best to reform or transform

politics and social relations, which have gone on ever since'.

Just two months before the completion of the centenary year of *Capital*, Bishnu Dey wrote this poem and translated it into English entitled 'One Hundred Years'. He quoted Dante's two lines from his 'Purgatorio's Canto V' which messaged to follow the poet. As a poet, Bishnu Dey wanted his readers to follow his works and talk over publicly. The entire poem entitled 'One Hundred Years', which got out of Marxists' syllabus of the country, is reproduced below:

ONE HUNDRED YEARS

Bishnu Dey

*Follow me and let the people talk;
stand thou as a firm tower which
never shakes its summit for blast of
winds...—PURGATORIO: V*

One hundred years have passed.

*Yet so many roads, shattered
roads, twisted,
Barbed, temptingly straight roads,
deceitful roads!*

*Perhaps one hears through the
labyrinth of crossroads
The laughter of unseen children,
Perhaps through the howl of hate
beyond the jungle,*

*Across the dry plains of our days
sings out*

*The pipe of some cowherd-boy of
some far country.*

*Yet the destination fades out day
and night on our*

perpetually frantic streets.

In having to elect each step,

*In every land of the distracted
world.*

*Across desert wiles or muddy
waters,*

*And Vietnam burns under na-
palms,*

*And, East and West, to-day over
this country,*

to-morrow over that

Vultures fly.

What a strange bitter joke!

*Yet the earth's geography wide-
spread with milestones.*

*And far flung history found an
explorer mapping the universe
of man*

*A century ago! Unique in genius
with prodigious knowledge,*

*With the wisdom of the most
hardworking thought, in love
with day to day life*

In Das Kapital!

*And in that tremendous epic the
last chord rings in Kailasan
rhythms,*

*Like a trumpet blowing in unison
with Dhurjati's duet dance,*

*Of what is possible in our Time
and of this ever wondering
quest,*

*And the triple vision reveals the
Enemy and the Friend,*

*With the unending call of Think-
ing with our human joys and
sorrows,*

*Of the daily faring forth to the
difficult yet certain destination.*

Here he draws a gloomy picture which engulfs a labyrinth where the Communist Parties forget the right addresses they would like to address.

This was Bishnu Dey who after long four decades of his demise has been left, so to speak, in lurch. Tragically enough such a thought-provoking poem has seldom been granted into the realms of the Marxist cultural arena in the country. □□

Readers are requested to note the changed address (new) of our website
www.frontierweekly.com

NANDIGRAM

**What Really Happened?
Report of the**

People's Tribunal on Nandigram

*copies available at
NAGARIK MANCH*

*134, Raja Rajendralal Mitra Road
Room No. 7, Block B (2nd Floor)
Kolkata 700085, Ph. : 2373-1921*

'WAR COMMUNISM'

Preparation of the 1947 Draft of the Programme of the CPSU(B)

Vijay Singh

THE CENTRAL OBJECTIVE OF Lenin and the Bolsheviks was the formation of a communist society.

This is evident from the programme adopted by the Russian Communist Party in March 22, 1919. The document accepted that the dictatorship of the proletariat had been established in Russia having the support of the poorest peasantry and the semi-proletariat. It had in the main expropriated the bourgeoisie so that means of production and exchange became the common property of all the toilers.

It was imperative to establish a uniform national plan which could engage in the rational and economic utilisation of the material resources of the country.

So far as the handicrafts were concerned producers' co-operatives were to be established which could carry out a painless transition to the higher forms of big mechanised industry.

In the agrarian sector, private property in land had been abolished. The state was inaugurating a number of measures to encourage large-scale socialist agriculture: establishing cooperative farms, state farms and agricultural communes.¹

It was recognised that only the first steps had been taken for the transition from capitalism to communism so that until there had been a complete organisation of communist production and distribution of products it was impossible to abolish money. It was considered possible in the meantime to extend the area of transactions without the

use of cash by the deposition of money compulsorily in the people's bank; the replacing of money by the use of cheques; and the issuing of short term notes which entitled the possessor to receive products.

The programme of 1919 illuminates the economic policies of the period of the civil war, known as 'war communism'.

In those three years, from June 1918 through to March 1921, further expropriations took place of the small sections of the industrial bourgeoisie. Such was the case also in transport, communications and distribution.

In agriculture private property in land had already ceased to exist; through the appropriation of agricultural surplus the socialist state controlled a part of the surplus; an attempt was made to bring the peasant farms under the purview of the plan.²

Some fifty industrial sectoral boards were established termed *glavki* which controlled industry under the formal writ of the Supreme Council for National Economy.

The attempt was made under war communism to abolish commodity-money relations. The expenses of enterprises were decided by centralised planning and covered by the state budget. The products of the enterprises were at the disposal of the central bodies. Centralised financing was replaced by the centralised supply in kind. Distribution of products was conducted by the centralised allocation of goods. Commodity exchange was ended between town and country

by decreeing the compulsory delivery of surplus grain. Taxation was abolished. The state distributed gratis housing, telephones, water, gas, electricity for workers and employees. Similarly, the urban populace was supplied differentiated food rations on the basis of class with priority given to the industrial workers performing dangerous and heavy labour.³

But commodity-money relations could not be abolished but they were driven underground. The state continued print currency notes whose value continued to shrink. Working people were compelled to use the extensive black market for the bulk of their purchases.

It proved impossible to sustain the economic policies of military communism once the civil war ended. In its place the policies of the New Economic Policy were introduced which utilised widespread commodity-money relations until such time as the economy revived in the period 1925-26 when industrial and agricultural production returned to the levels of 1913. This laid the basis for the socialist offensives which established directive centralised planning, incepted socialist industrialisation based on the production of the means of production (with the lead being given to production of the means of production of production of Department¹, and introduced socialist collectivisation based on the poor and middle peasantry with the agricultural instruments and means of production remaining in the socialised sector. Collectivisation ended the existence of the last section of the most numerous class of the bourgeoisie, the rich peasantry.

In such conditions Stalin argued in his Speech on the Draft Constitution of the USSR in 1936 that the Soviet Union had achieved the con-

struction of the foundations of socialism in the main. Stalin had earlier said in the 17th Congress of the CPSU(B) in 1934 that the task of building a classless socialist society remained for the future.

Extensive discussions took place at the 18th Congress of the CPSU(B) in 1939 on the building of the classless socialist society and the transition to the communist society.⁴ It was suggested by Voznesensky that while it had taken two decades for the Soviet Union to construct socialism a lesser period would be required for the transition to communism. Detailed discussions on this question were held at the congress and a commission was set up to draft a new programme for the party.

In conjunction with this a new 15-year perspective plan was drawn up by Gosplan in two volumes for the period 1947–1953. This considered the need to surpass the per capita production of the capitalist countries in pig iron, steel, oil, electricity, machinery and the means of production and articles of necessity. In terms of social relations it was planned to raise the level of the workers and collective farm workers to that of the workers in the technical and engineering sectors.

The perspective plan for the transition to communism naturally had to be ended with the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union but it was immediately resumed in 1945 on the lines suggested at the 18th Congress of the party in 1939 and subsequently.

Instructively Stalin in September 1946 argued that it was possible to construct communism in one country in the Soviet example.

At the foundation of the Informburo in Poland in September 1947 Malenkov stated that the CPSU(B) was elaborating a new party programme.

That draft programme is published in the journal ‘Revolutionary Democracy’ (October 2023) for the first time.

The version selected there has the notes of Stalin.

Aside from the detailed discussions on this draft by the party leadership, Gosplan was involved in working out the implications of the new programme for the planning mechanism. Voznesensky argued in the Central Committee for a 20-year plan for establishing communism in the Soviet Union. This was necessary to bring the preparatory steps to communism to fruition and to expand the productive forces and the construction of new, large construction work: railway lines, metallurgical factories. These would lead to the Soviet Union overtaking the advanced capitalist countries in terms of per capital industrial production.

The party authorised such a plan in August 1947. The Gosplan, the Academy of Sciences and local Soviet and Party organisations analysed the productive strength of the economic regions of the country and formed the framework of a perspective for the economy for the period 1951–70.

Gosplan was rightly concerned with the development of the forces of production.⁷ The relations of production were discussed by Stalin in *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*. The significance of his remarks is that he sought to concretise the gradual steps necessary for the transition to a communist society in the Soviet Union. Stalin argued that the existence of group property in the collective farms and therefore of commodity circulation hampered the full extension of state planning to the whole of the national economy especially in agriculture. It was necessary to gradually convert collective farm property

into public property and replace commodity circulation with products-exchange between town and country (which meant the end of Soviet trade). This would be to the benefit of the collective farm peasantry as they would receive more products from state industry.⁸

After March 1953 the CPSU was guided not by Marxism-Leninism but the ideas fought by Stalin in *Economic Problems* and his related writings: *Bogdanovism*, *Bukharinism*, *Trotskyism*; and specifically in the realm of political economy the ‘market socialist’ notions of Notkin, Venzher and Sanina. The ideological rupture with Marxism-Leninism spread internationally in the bulk of the people’s democracies and the majority of the international communist movement. The Soviet state no longer carried out the functions of the dictatorship of the proletariat formally positing this in 1961 when it was accepted that the Soviet Union was now the ‘state of the whole people’. Parallel to this the majority of the people’s democracies no longer carried out the functions of the dictatorship of the proletariat after 1953.⁹

The programme for communist construction in the Soviet Union involving the development of the productive forces and changes in the production relations was ended. The question of having a higher rate of expansion of Department 1 for the purposes of social reproduction was downgraded. The perspective of the gradual conversion of collective farms to agricultural communes was terminated. The plan of replacing commodity circulation by products-exchange was swiftly discontinued.

The archives of the State Planning Commission, Gosplan, establish unequivocally that the foundations of a system of generalised commodity production was estab-

lished in the years 1953 to 1958. Directive centralised planning which had constructed socialism and which was being utilised for the transition to communism was terminated and replaced from March 1953 by a system of “co-ordinated planning” involving the economic negotiations between the central and union republic governments. The state planning commission itself was divided into two organisations. The sphere of influence of Gosplan was reduced by expanding the powers of the directors of the enterprises who were now required to accept that the criterion of efficiency was the principle of profitability. The commodification of the instruments and means of production was enacted both in industry and agriculture. While under the socialist system the products of industry were allocated under the plan after 1958 these products were now designated as commodities which circulated in the state sector. Some twenty agencies were established under Gosplan to sell the commodities produced by Soviet industrial enterprises. In agriculture following the example of Yugoslavia the instruments and means of production, the Machine Tractor Stations, were sold to the collective farms. This signified that in the Soviet Union (and in People’s China) a section of the socialised means of production now became part of the group property of the collective farms (and later the People’s Communes) thereby massively expanding the area of commodity circulation. In such a situation there was an inevitable reemergence in the Soviet Union of such categories as labour power as a commodity, surplus value, profit and the average rate of profit.

The programme for communist construction which was put forward by the CPSU in 1961 in the time of Khrushchev envisaged the further

deepened expansion of commodity-money relations including wide independence of the enterprises and profit until such time as there was a single communist form of property when commodity-money relations would become outdated. No concrete steps were proposed to bring about a single communist property as had been in evidence in the 1919 party programme or right through to *Economic Problems* and the 19th party congress in 1952. Indeed it was considered necessary that farming on the collective farms had to be based on the principle of profitability. As in People’s China in the People’s Communes it was to be proposed to submerge social property in the state sector into the semi-socialist group property of the collective farms. Earlier the Machine Tractor Stations, which Stalin had defended from the Venzher and Sanina suggestion to commodify them by selling them to the collective farms, had been vended to the collective farms in 1958. It was now the policy to merge the collective farms, the state farms and the industrial enterprises which would have at a wider level reduced the social property of the state farms and industry to group property.¹⁰ It contradicted the programme advocated by Khrushchev of building up a single communist property in the Soviet Union.

The CPSU and Khrushchev made the transition from the construction of commodity ‘socialism’ in the period 1953-1958 to projecting a commodity ‘communism’ in 1961.

□□□

Endnotes :

- 1) *Programma i ustava VKP (b)*, (1919), Partizdat TsK VKP (B), Moscow 1936, 64 pp. This publication was printed in an edition of two hundred thousand copies.
- 2) László Szamuely, *First Models of the Socialist Economic Systems:*

Principles and Theories, Akademiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1974. p11.

- 3) *Ibid.* 15, 17.
- 4) Vijay Singh, *The CPSU(B), Gosplan and the Question of the Transition to Communist Society in the Soviet Union 1939-1953*, *Revolutionary Democracy*, Vol. III, No. 1, April 1997. <https://www.revolutionarydemocracy.org/rdv3n1/gosplan.htm>
- 5) *Informatsionnoe soveshchanie predstaviteleye nekotorykh kompartiiye, v Pol'she v kontse Septyabrya 1947 goda*, *Ogiz Gosizpolit*, Moscow, 1948, p.153.
- 6) *Stalinskoe ekonomicheskoe nasledstvo: plany i diskussii 1947-1953gg. Dokumenty i materialy*, Compiled by V.V. Zhuravlev and L.N. Lazareva, Rosspen, Moscow, 2017, 640 pages, pp. 118-138. See also the volume: V.V. Trushkov, *Neizvestnaya Programma VKP (b)*, Moscow, 2018, 288pp.
- 7) See also: M.I. Rubinstein, *O sozdanii materialn'o-tekhnicheskoye bazy kommunizma*, *Molodaya Guardia*, Moscow, 1952, 40pp, and his *Soviet Science and Technique in the Service of Building Communism in the USSR*, *FLPH*, Moscow 1954, 236pp.
- 8) I. Stalin, *Economicheskie problem sotsializma v SSSR*, Moscow, 1952, pp. 204-221. See also: N. Smolin, *Rudimentary Forms of Products Exchange*. <https://revolutionarydemocracy.org/rdv13n1/smolin.htm>
- 9) Vijay Singh, *Some Questions of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the People’s Democracies*, *Revolutionary Democracy*, Vol. I, No. 1, (New Series), April 2022.
- 10) *Programma Communisticheskoi Partii Sovetskogo Soyuza in XXII S'ezd Kommunisticheskoi Partii Sovetskogo Soyuza*, 17-31 *Oktyabrya 1961 goda*, *Stenograficheskiye otchet*, III, *Gospolitizdat*, Moscow, 1962, pp. 229-335.

*With best
compliments
from*

Sleeping Buddha

R I S H Y A P

KALIMPONG, WEST BENGAL
Ph: +91 33 22150898
www.nakshatraresorts.in
operations.nrpl@gmail.com

POLEMICS

Marxism, Capitalism and Democracy

Arup Baisya

MARX'S CONCEPT OF THE Asiatic Mode of Production represented the dominance of bureaucrats in situations where the state was the economic and political power, and where private property was relatively unimportant (Miliband 1989:94). Irrespective of the fact whether Marx's assessment on a mode of production and static society specific to Asia is right, this interpretation associates authoritarianism with pre-capitalist society and democracy with capitalism and rise of the bourgeoisie. But the laws of motion of Capital as Marx described in his incomplete magnum opus 'Capital' tells us that the capitalist social relations of production always exists in an organically intertwined form within the dialectical relation between authoritarianism and democracy. This motion of this dialectics between authoritarianism and democracy is reflected and modulated by the functioning of the state. The democratic aspiration that is born from within the society due to the emergence of capitalist relations of production is always intertwined with its opposite to be a capitalist system where economy, politics, sociology, ideology etc all get intermingled to determine its direction of motion and at the same time create indeterminacy in the motion from authoritarianism to democracy and vice versa. In the Capital, Marx emphasised that the competition is the basic trait of capitalist production. Due to competition, the ratio of organic composition of capital goes on increasing and thus causing the rate of profit to fall. This tendency of falling rate of profit necessitates capital to flow

from the territorial area where it has first developed to a territorial area where the pre-capitalist relations are predominant. This imperialist behaviour of capital from its birth reveals that pre-capitalist relations are ubiquitous within the capitalist global system with quantitative difference imposed by the motion of capital in time axis. The tendency of rate of profit to fall will set in the area of origin of capitalist production when the pre-capitalist relations are still in existence as remnants and the capitalist relations i.e. workers free from bondage with land and religious patriarchal families must have their rudimentary presence in the area of destination of the capital to move. This is the territorial logic of the societal dynamics of the movement of capital. This means that Marx was not the advocate of western rationalism to delineate the capitalism as democracy or for that matter of fact a liberal democracy. On the contrary, this writer would like to emphasise that Marxism is in essence democracy and the laws of motion of capitalism as Marx envisaged is the extension of democracy for its transition to socialism for reaching to its final stage as communism where both state and democracy wither away. Marx formulated the law of values based on relative surplus value and value of labour power as wages of industrial production and in that sense only, the law of value is incomplete to accommodate the capitalist reproduction to appropriate family labour and the super-exploitation due to the presence of pre-capitalist relations inherent within the capitalist system. How Marxism is in essence

democracy needs to be dealt with deep understanding of social relations of production and this write-up is just a preliminary attempt to highlight this aspect of Marxism.

The initial success stories of neoliberal restructuring have now turned out to be myths. Neoliberalism is no longer considered as a way forward to lead the capitalist system out of the crisis. Indeed, there is no silver lining in the horizon of capitalist world for a recovery from crisis. The situation in much of the emerging world seemed quite chaotic, and parliamentary democratic government did not appear to hold a solution. Authoritarianism or fascism soon emerged as a common political arrangement. The alternative is socialism transcending capitalism. Marx visualised socialism as a movement of the working class in politics. In such visualisation, the fundamental aspect is once again the motion in time for synthesis of dialectically related phenomena of working class emancipation and formation of political party. The organisation of workers "into a class and consequently into a political party" (Marx and Engels) is necessary for workers to conquer political power. The political party that epitomised the political power of a class should not affect the autonomy of the working class as a political force and should not be corrupted by the influence of reformist trends of other classes. How Marx's celebrated phrase, "the emancipation of working class is conquered by themselves" is compatible with idea of formation of a party which is absolutely necessary for conquering political power? This compatibility must be understood in the direction of motion emerging from the contradiction between party and class. The autonomy of the Bourgeois class is guaranteed in the existing system and the bourgeois party is systemically

subservient to the interest of bourgeois class and as such, the accumulation of capital and profit are the driving forces to resolve the conflict between party and class. But what is the driving force to expedite the motion for continuously synthesising the two aspects – the working class emancipation and its political party, for a change of society and state. The synthesis is not systemically guaranteed, rather this synthesis is ensured within an accelerated motion in a continuous struggle against the existing system and building the alternative system in a rudimentary form till conquering of power by the working class. The ideological position and mind theory for a future equitable society do not have any ramification on the society till it is transformed into action. What is the vehicle or instrument that act as an accelerator or brake on this motion. It is the democracy or lack of it. “From the workers, to the workers” is an inchoate idea of such a democratic praxis. Marx advocated the organisation of workers “into a class and consequently into a political party”. Does it imply that party cannot be formed without the transformation of workers into a class? This transformation cannot be assessed without considering a well-defined space-time continuum. Transformation or emancipation always happens in a moment of time. So it cannot be concluded that the formation of a party is best suited on a global space in a particular moment of time. Then how and who will assess this transformation of workers into a class? Naturally it’s a group or party which bears a working-class ideology and radical theory of mind for change of society and the state. But this party is not the party of the working class so long as such working class emancipation conquered by the working class themselves has not become reality and in such a scenario, the party which

claims to carry the ideology and theory of mind is prone to degenerate to impose their ideas on the working class. Here lies the dichotomy. The regular election within the party hierarchy is a necessary condition, but it is far from sufficient to retain its working class character. There is no measuring stick to identify that the party delegates represent the workers’ aspiration.

The practice for democratic principle and struggle for democratisation can be a panacea for such tendency to degenerate for class compromise. As the bourgeois parties are subservient to the interest of the bourgeois class and it is guaranteed by the existing system, the communist party must also be made subservient to working class through the struggle for democracy, and democratic mechanism which is not ingrained in the system needs to be evolved. One such mechanism would be to ensure the functioning of the unified and autonomous working class organisation like Trade Union which needs to be evolved through struggle. So long as the emancipation of working class is not conquered by the working class themselves, their own autonomous organisation may make mistakes because of their low level of aspiration that does not conform to the idea that working class is the bearer of complete individual freedom and liberty for humanity to be achieved in a future society. Class interest does not necessarily correspond with the interest of individual workers or workers of specific firm or sector with particularistic interest and incentives for enforcing collective discipline. The union, party or the state have the means to organise workers as a collective force as Marx put it, “combination always has a double aim, that of stopping competition among workers so that they can carry on general competition with the capitalists”. As Marx and Engels

noted in the *Communist Manifesto* “the organisation of the proletariat into a class, and consequently into a political party, is continually being upset by the competition among workers themselves.” But despite their mistakes, they will always challenge their ruling class adversary as a whole or as a section of capitalists due to the essence of their class character and that is why, the party may play the role of educator, but must be educated by being subservient to the working class and their organisation. To play the role of educator, party’s opinion must always be open for debate for a test for rectification and change. And to act as an entity to be educated, it must respect and comply with the

LAND REFORMS IN LEFT REGIME

A Probe into West Bengal's Socio-Economic Perspective 1977-2011

by **MANAS BAKSHI**

Price: Rs 195

♦♦♦♦

“Land Reforms in Left Regime” by Manas Bakshi takes a long hard look at the scenario which prevailed in the state for more than three decades. The book finds that the fruits of land reforms had been frittered away”. —*The Statesman*

♦♦♦♦

“...a well-researched volume. To his credit, Bakshi has conducted his research objectively, without being influenced by the multitude of propaganda on the subject. It is difficult to accuse the writer of bias”. —*The Telegraph*

♦♦♦♦

...starts with Operation Barga, give details about the minimum wage-related issues and focuses on the land reforms’ impact in the Panchayat System”. —*The Asian Age*

♦♦♦♦

There is little doubt that this book will be immensely useful to all those interested in the subject, simply because the author has tried to be as objective as possible in his judgement, and pressed into service a great deal of information. —*Frontier*

ALLIED PUBLISHERS PVT LTD

Kolkata, Mumbai, New Delhi,
Chennai, Bangalore, Nagpur,
Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Lucknow

decision of the workers' own organisation.

There are two vexed issues that have led the practising Marxists into disarray and state of confusion. Firstly, from the time of Marx to the pre-neoliberal phase, there is a rallying point on the question of what constitutes working class or proletariat. The workers organised in large factories in the industrial capitalist production system have been considered as the fulcrum of working class emancipation for radical change transcending capitalism. The neoliberal reconstruction of capital and labour obscures the scenario to identify working class. Marx never identified the large factory workers as the only form of working class. But Marx analysed capitalist production based on relative surplus value and value of labour power i.e. cost of labourer's subsistence. Does it mean that the living labour which is engaged with dead labour as capital in a relation where only relative surplus value is appropriated and the value of labour power is received in return solely constitutes the working class? This is problematic when one considers capitalist system as a whole. From Marx's theory of capitalist expansion based on organic composition of labour and the history of capitalism, it is revealed that capitalist system is a system where dominant capitalist relations is intertwined with pre-capitalist relations. As such, those who earn their livelihood from labour and do not enjoy a part of the surplus value extracted from others' labour constitute the working class. The value earned from labour which does not exceed the average value of labour of a society in a production system of a particular country and specific to a space-time defined by average necessary labour time must constitute the limit for categorisation of a person engaged in labour as worker, beyond which the individual enters to the

class which is enjoying the fruits of the surplus extracted from labour of others. The value of labour power is no more than a definite quantity of average value of a society incorporated in the labour time requisite for the production of labour reduces itself to that necessary for the production of labourer's means of subsistence. That means that those who are earning their livelihood from the income below the average value of labour in a society can be considered as workers. That's why, there are differential rates of wages for different categories of manual and mental workers – above, at par and below the value of their labour power, and the capitalist system maintains these differential rates to create divisions within the workers for the sustenance of the system. Secondly, in a dependent economy within the global capitalist system, the significant presence of pre-capitalist relation influences the workers' movement in such a way that the workers' movement carries with it the presence of other classes which influence the class content of the movement, and the reverse is also true i.e. the movement of other classes such as peasantry or middle classes is also influenced by the working class content. This overlapping of content of the people's movement obscures the working class movement and hampers the autonomy of workers' own organisation. This problematic leads one to another terrain to assess the formation of class.

In addition to the transformation of "class in itself" to "class for itself", Marx also emphasised that economic, political, and ideological conditions jointly structure the realm of struggle that have their effect on the organisation of classes. It is not the objective economic, political and ideological conditions alone that define the classes. Classes must be viewed as effects of struggles struc-

tured by objective conditions that are simultaneously economic, political and ideological. This idea of struggle giving rise to class formation ensures the democratic functioning of the party. The continuous class-formation means continuous struggle which in turn means continuous motion in time. The society and its form, Marx emphasised, is the product of man's reciprocal action. It is not the relations of production alone, the recognition of the oppression by the oppressed for its reciprocal action results in the formation of class and their struggle as class-struggle. The energy released by the struggle creates an energy-field within which both class and organisation and party cohabit to influence one another. This is the organic relations in motion that causes continuous change in the character of the class, organisation and the party, and the idea of a party always sermonising the class which it claims to represent is demolished. The dynamic process emanating from the struggles that determine the class formation vis-à-vis moulding and remoulding of the party also carries with it some extent of indetermination. This is the democratic premise where Gramsci's idea of organic relations between party and class makes sense.

In the context of dependent economy like India, the democracy deficit within the practising communist parties are primarily caused due to neglecting the dynamics of party-class relations and the influence of patriarchal authoritarian pre-capitalist relations. Historian Ayesha Jalal observed, "While caste has been an important indigenous classificatory scheme, Indians have never defined nor divided up their social universe exclusively in terms of caste. There are innumerable local terms in usage of a class character. For instance, in every regional Indian language there are terms for sharecrop-

per, labourer, small peasant, rich peasant, landlord, moneylender and so forth. Like the colonial rulers, investigators of Indian society have been so enamoured by caste that they have paid insufficient attention to the classification of Indian society on schemes other than caste". In the caste-class dynamics, the radical societal change of a country within the ambit of global capitalist system is always dependent on workers' struggle and working class emancipation to represent the idea of freedom and liberty of the people who are engaged in a production system in a continuous motion within the complex of capitalist and pre-capitalist production system. Historian Ranajit Guha of subaltern school, conceptualised the historical articulation of power in colonial India in all its institutional, model, and discursive aspects as the interaction of these two terms—domination and subordination as D/S in short. Marx showed when the organic composition of capital i.e. the ratio of fixed capital and variable capital i.e. C/V becomes too high in a capitalist space; the capital tends to move to a space of pre-capitalist relation to ensure profit and accumulation. In all stages of imperialism, these two phenomena cannot be visualised in an isolated manner. In a global capitalist system, these two integral components are modulated by the latter in its motion in time towards formation of working class both in the production relations and in the struggle against hegemonic and dominant oppression. As discussed before, it is the struggle for democracy that ensures communist character of the party to be party of working class. This struggle for democracy has become more pressing after long phase of neoliberal restructuring.

In a post-revolutionary society for building socialism transcending capitalism, the struggle for democracy

becomes more intense and inter-dependent on various fronts— state, politics, economy and sociology, though the basic tenet of Marxism i.e. workers as the moving force of socialism as they constitute the only class that has the capacity to organise production on its own once capitalist relations are abolished, remains the same as the organic relations between socialism and working class. The capitalist economy envisages the productivity of labour and production system for generating surplus labour as the marginal rate of growth of labour productivity with regard to the growth of capital, the marginal rate at which non-capitalist places of production are destroyed when the productivity of capitalist labour expands, the rate of growth of capital with regard to time, and the rate of growth of population. This needs to be reversed with Mandel's idea that productive labour is all labour which creates, modifies, or conserves use-values or which is technically indispensable for realising them. The nationalisation of means of production, banking and finance may be a good beginning, but it entails nothing socialist provided the struggle for democratisation of state, politics and society is not considered as the driving force. It only provides a weapon to support the working class for their empowerment. But how can the existing state which has been evolved to serve the interest of Bourgeois class be used by the working class which is not organised in the production system at the national or global level? The preliminary democratisation of the state for building of socialism was prescribed by Marx in Gotha Programme based on his observation of Paris Commune. But it should be much more than that in the present context of global capitalism. The world not yet had another occasion like Paris Commune to observe to formulate further on democratisation

of state, but people have observed the fall and dismantling of really existing socialist states and the contradiction between liberal democracy and authoritarian or fascist state under bourgeois rule. This experience narrates that socialist state must retain all the democratic parameters of a well-developed bourgeois liberal democracy. One learns from the bourgeois liberal state about what should be continued and retained and people know something new characteristics of socialist state from what Marx formulated from the observation of Paris Commune – but the question is what should be the new aspects of democracy for a socialist state in the present context of capitalism for its transcendence? In Indian context, there are some Marxist advocates who think that institutional centre-state federal structure along with three-tier Panchayati Raj system with Ward-Sabhas at the base can be a good model for a new state where the present *top-down* arrangement is reversed to make it *bottom-up* with adequate devolution of power at the base. It is important that question of democracy should be brought to centre-stage in the Marxist discourse because Marxism in essence is about democracy. In the production front, to replace exchange value with use value, productive reconstruction must be decentralised in such a way that production unit becomes autonomous unit of associated labour to ensure workers' control i.e. democratic empowerment of the producers or labour. But everything is destined to fail if the fundamental tenet of democracy evolved through the organic relation between communist party and working class as discussed above is not strictly adhered to for continuous class-struggle and vibrant lively open debate for revolution and to ensure the process of withering away of state, class and even democracy towards communist society. □□□

“SOFT FASCISM”?

Ascendancy of Capitalism in China

Harsh Thakor

TODAY EVEN UNDER XI Jinping professing ‘Socialism with Chinese Characteristics’, China is masking itself as a Socialist state or disguising its capitalist nature. No doubt, it is a more progressive state or economy than other third world countries, with the state administering the market economy, and citizens enjoying more benefits in all spheres of life. Post-1978 the Chinese State completely undid or reversed the policies from 1949-1978. All positive features of China today had their seeds planted in the steps taken in the Maoist era. Since 1978 China reverted all the Socialist methods, like dismantling the communes and promoting profit oriented production by inviting American Special Economic Zones.

True, it is not classically capitalist like the Western Democracies and its socialist modernisation road was more progressive than Western capitalism. However even if state controlled it is market forces that determine the economy, which has paved way for mushrooming of billionaires.

After the death of Mao Zedong, China became a bourgeois state. China is definitely not a bourgeois democracy, but, it is also not quite a fascist state of the Nazi type. Its practice could be categorised as “soft fascism”. Here, the people are mostly not convicted unless and until they rebel to change the social system. No publications are allowed which try to educate and organise the people in organising a revolutionary movement. The Internet is severely censored, as are foreign publications, films, etc.

Today like Cuba, in certain ways, particularly citizen’s welfare, one

must defend China, from the lies or conspiracy of the Western media, but still must expose in essence, its **social-imperialist** nature.

The working conditions of contemporary Chinese workers are very poor. Workers are generally faced with such dilemmas as long working hours and strong work intensity, being often in arrears with wages and being underpaid, insufficient social welfare, minimum security of working environment, and illegal layoffs.

The standard working hours stipulated by Chinese laws are 8 hours per day, an average of no more than 44 hours per week, and at least one day off per week. However, according to the investigation of data, the working hours of most wage posts far prolong 44 hours. For example, according to the statistics of the National Bureau of Statistics in July 2018, the average weekly working hours of Chinese enterprise employees in that month were 46 hours. (Including those bureaucratic wastes that do nothing)

Wages are often low with wage arrears, a routine feature. Construction workers’ wages are most seriously in arrears. Most labour disputes in China are caused by wage arrears. In the context of the COVID-19, wage arrears in China can be seen everywhere. There are too many cases of salary arrears. Wage arrears are more likely to ignite the spark of the workers’ movement.

On May 28, 2020, Li Keqiang, then Premier of the State Council, publicly said at the press conference of the Third Session of the 13th National People’s Congress: “The average monthly income of 600 million people with low and middle

income and below is about 1000 yuan”. In response to the outside world, the spokesman of the National Bureau of Statistics said, “The monthly per capita income of 600 million people is 1000 yuan, which can be verified by the national household income and expenditure and living conditions survey data”. Private organisations have also investigated the problem of low wages. For example, according to the judgment of a private survey organisation, if the minimum wage should be 40% of the average wage, it is suggested that the monthly minimum wage in Guangdong Province in 2019 should be 3728 yuan in Guangzhou, 2331 yuan in Dongguan, and 2588 yuan in Huizhou, while the minimum wage in the fourth tier cities like Heyuan is 2298 yuan—while the actual minimum wage in these four places is only 2100 yuan, 1720 yuan, 1550 yuan, and 1410 yuan respectively.

According to the data of the National Bureau of Statistics, in 2020, the basic endowment insurance for employees will only cover about 71% of urban employees, and only 47% of employees will have unemployment insurance.. The current social security model in China is the intergenerational compensation system, that is, the social security provided to the elderly in the same period with the tax paid by the young.

On April 10, 2019, the report released by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences showed that the current balance of the basic endowment insurance fund for urban enterprise employees in China would be negative for the first time by 2028, after which the endowment insurance fund reserve would decline rapidly and the accumulated balance might be exhausted around 2035. It can be understood that China’s current social security model

—intergenerational compensation system—has a tendency to collapse in contemporary China, where the aging population is deepening. This is one of the important reasons why the Chinese revisionist party has repeatedly enforced the birth restriction. The reason for the insufficient welfare of social security is that many enterprises fail to pay social security for their employees in accordance with the law.

Production safety is supposed to penetrate the whole production process, but the authorities do not give priority to this field of production safety. Although many documents emphasise production safety, this kind of production safety only exists on paper.

Many types of illegal layoffs were tacitly given sanction by the authorities. It is also important to point out that the current situation of the working people is deteriorating under the wrong and extreme epidemic prevention policy of the Chinese ruling establishment. In areas where the epidemic is grave, many factories have become redundant, and workers have almost no source of wages. Not only the factory workers are facing such difficulties, but also many takeout workers living in urban villages are seriously affected. These takeout workers have to take a quilt with them to sleep in the street because they are afraid that the village will be closed down and they can no longer feed themselves and their families. Some workers engaged in shelter construction were found infected after the project was completed, but the Chinese government just wanted to let these workers leave quickly, and did not provide any medical support to these workers.

Under the wrong and extreme epidemic prevention policy, some factories in high-risk areas did not stop working, and workers were ordered to

continue working but could not do a good job of protection, resulting in continuous infection of workers. These infected workers are trapped in the park without effective treatment. Faced with such abominable working conditions, many friends spontaneously resisted. However, the people who bravely fought for the rights of the working class were victimised by Chinese government.

Most factories in China today can be called “sweatshops” which is the outcome of privatisation. In the era of Mao Zedong, the factory strictly abided by the provisions of the “Angang Constitution”—“cadres participate in labour, workers participate in management, reform unreasonable rules and regulations, and combine workers, leading cadres and technicians”. Under the guidance of Angang’s Constitution, the factories in Mao Zedong’s era not only had high status of workers, but also had high enthusiasm for production, which was conducive to the progress of production technology. The advanced factory system like the Ansteel Constitution only exists in the socialist society. Since the restoration of capitalism, the Constitution of Angang has also been eradicated. With the abolishment of the Angang Constitution and the restoration of the “one leader system”, workers lost their rights and were naturally slaughtered in the factory.

Since the restoration of capitalism in China, the domestic workers’ strikes and other collective actions ignited one after another. The vast majority of these strikes and collective action incidents are spontaneous. According to incomplete statistics, there were more than 14000 such incidents in the decade from 2011 to 2021. Some of these strikes were led by Maoists, some by bourgeois liberals.

Strikes are illegal in the Constitution of China. While being brutally

suppressed, these workers were stigmatised as “colluding with foreign forces”, which is a common practice.

China’s “new left” refers to the trend of thought that was born in the 1990s and is different from the traditional Marxism-Leninism (Marxism Leninism Maoism), so it is called the “new left”. Their goal is to cultivate the western “democratic freedom” trend of thought and its “criticism” of traditional views. After the counter-revolutionary coup in 1976 in the last century, those who were stood loyal to Chairman Mao’s revolutionary line in the Chinese party and government were severely punished. After that, the so-called leftist ideologies spread only when some rebels who missed Chairman Mao and escaped the purge secretly publicised socialist theory through legitimate magazines and pretended to support Deng Xiaoping Theory.

The Maoist forces have undertaken some practical work to win the support of the masses, but members basically act in their personal identities, rarely in the name of the organisation, because it is easy to

BOOKS BY T VIJAYENDRA

Just Released

REQUIEM FOR OUR TIMES Rs. 100

AFTER ALL IT IS ONLY HIM!

AND OTHER STORIES Rs. 70

**AN INTELLIGENT BIRD'S GUIDE
TO THE BIRDWATCHER AND
OTHER STORIES**

Second reprint Rs. 40

THE LOSERS SHALL

INHERIT THE WORLD

Third Reprint Rs. 60

**REGAINING PARADISE:
TOWARDS A FOSSIL FUEL FREE
SOCIETY** Rs. 120

**THE TEACHER AND
THE CHILD LABOUR** Rs. 50

For Copies Contact :

MANCHI PUSTAKAM

12-13-439, St. No. 1 Tarnaka,
Secunderabad 500017

Email: info@manchipustakam.in
Cell: +91 73822 97430

expose their identities when acting in the name of the organisation. They irregularly carry out social surveys on the working class, give some common sense legal guidance to workers who need to safeguard their rights, distribute leaflets and post leaflets. The content of the leaflet includes an analysis of the current society, as well as information about

the contemporary international communist movement.

The neo-Maoists have to make a departure from conventional methods and devise new forms of organisation in accordance to changes in the digital age in production and machinery. Still the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution methods are relevant, but people's war

as path is outdated and even conventional communist party vanguard party concept has to be revised. Unlike the 1949 revolution which was rural based, the current revolution would be urban based. □□□

[The author is grateful for information from an interview with Chinese Maoists in Beir Bua Resistance Reports in Bearbua.medium as well as East Asia Forum.]

CAPITALISM TODAY

Markets and Democracy: A Brewing Crisis

Anup Sinha

THE CAPITALIST MODE OF production, in all its variations and specificities, share one thing in common: it makes the future seductively attractive, whatever be the present condition of the viewer. The system promises wealth, a comfortable life and greater opportunities to consume a larger variety of goods and services, and above all, the freedom to think and act according to individual choice. One can delegate the responsibility of governance to one's representatives chosen through the ballot box. The franchise of the ballot also gives the individual the liberty to change the representatives if their performances are not up to the mark. As far as livelihoods and incomes are concerned there is the right to choose whatever one wishes to pursue, from starting a business to becoming a corporate executive, or working for government. One can choose professions too—law, medicine, academics, artist, and so on. The formal equality of opportunities and rights makes the system appear equitable and fair. People can raise their voices over grievances. The system promises to work for the long-term benefit of individuals and groups. The state sets rules to protect each individual from the whims and follies of others, as well as

provide protection for everybody against foreign aggression. Markets and electoral democracy are the institutions that provide sustenance to the system of capitalism. Textbooks extolling the virtues of capitalism claim that while people vote in the market with dollars, the one-person one-vote rule in the arena of politics makes it possible to temper the power of the people with the bigger packet of dollars.

This is the reason why, in the discussion about alternatives to capitalism—the economic as well as the political pillars of the system—it is claimed that there is no better system available. The discussions usually take place in terms of the abstract understanding of the ideal structure of capitalism. Social and economic outcomes can be influenced with state policies, but these are minor nudges that correct deficiencies. They are not supposed to break the structures of private property, free markets and electoral machineries. That is why the proverbial democracy's man-in-the-street can always rely on the system to look after him, if not today, then certainly in the future. It is like a casino game—win some, lose some, win big, win small, hit the jackpot or be ruined. When one is gambling who wants to think about being

ruined? That is why, for over the past 250 years the system has altered in appearance but survived in essence.

Despite the amazing success of capitalism and the remarkable resilience it has shown in terms of withstanding challenges, there are questions being raised once again on the inherent strengths and weaknesses of capitalism. Markets look increasingly unstable and unpredictable, shocking economic inequalities and concentration of powers, a rising trend of political authoritarianism in governments, the unintended and adverse consequences of technologies, and above all, the threat to nature coming out of the great human enterprise of growth and development; have all contributed to making capitalism look unusually vulnerable.

The Markers of Inequality and Concentration

One trend that capitalist market economies exhibit is the growing concentration of wealth and incomes. Enterprises based on private property and facing competition from other enterprises must necessarily and continuously expand their capacities to produce, capture larger share of markets, gather innovative power and keep making profits in order to survive. There is an inherent compulsion to grow for growth's sake. In this race some win, some lose, some disappear, and some are gobbled up by larger firms and organisations. Larger firms in con-

centrated markets typically have greater control over prices and outputs. They have larger control over input prices as they tend to be large bulk buyers of material and labour. The largest multinational companies in the world have spending budgets that are larger than the annual national budgets of many small and developing nations of the world. There are a number of implications of this trend. First of all, the bigger a firm is the more likely is its political influence and power to shape government policies and rules. The second implication is that the bigger is the firm the bigger is its ability to deter competition from new but smaller firms in the industry. The third implication is that the bigger is the firm the larger is its ability to stifle small business by being in a position of power to integrate allied businesses and activities into its own domain. For instance, distribution channels previously owned by small businesses may be acquired by a large firm, or ancillary goods producing units could be bought and integrated. Large firms not only keep growing in scale, but also in terms of diversification of products and lines of business. They typically tend to become conglomerates. Income and wealth have been increasingly concentrated across countries as well as within nations during the past 70 to 80 years. The recent World Inequality Report 2022 shows the massive inequality in the world as far as incomes and wealth holdings are concerned. The top 1 percent of the global population holds 38 percent of global wealth and earns 19 percent of incomes. The next 9 percent holds 38 percent of wealth and earns 33 percent of income. The bottom poorest 50 percent people of the world hold a mere 2 percent of wealth and earn a paltry 8 percent of income.

There are a number of implications of this trend. First, it tends to generate social misery, distrust, crime, anger and violence. This, in turn, tends to invite greater political authoritarianism to suppress any instability. The rich need protection. The poor have to be contained. The second implication is that the inequalities tend to produce a parallel inequality in carbon dioxide emissions so important in controlling climate change dangers. The same data set shows that the top 1 percent emit 17 percent of greenhouse gases, the next 9 percent, 31 percent, while the poorest 50 percent emit a mere 12 percent of global carbon dioxide. The notable issue is that growing inequality is built in to the life line of capitalistic growth and continuity. It can be reduced significantly by suitable policies, but they are not. Why? Are policy makers not as neutral as they are claimed to be.

The Environmental End-game

Before proceeding further, it is worthwhile probing one question that is being increasingly asked: can this indefinite growth of the economic system continue much longer? During the past 200 years or so, the production (both in scale and variety) of goods and services have grown astonishingly fast and continuously. Think of the industrially produced or industrially supported materials and services one uses in everyday life. The days of James Watt and his steam engine has been surpassed to the point of singularity. A James Watt, if brought to earth today, would have great difficulty in recognising any of the everyday goods people use almost out of habit. This period was referred to as the Great Acceleration in economic progress.

Now, the data for the amount of natural resources humanity has used

up during the same period of time are being juxtaposed against the data of the Great Acceleration. The second set of data shows the Great Depletion of natural resources. Human beings have a tendency to master and control Nature often forgetting that humans are also part of Nature. The great machinery of capitalism has looked upon Nature as both a bottomless gift hamper and a bottomless garbage dump. People have used resources from Nature starting with intensive use of land, mineral ores, fossil fuels, fresh water, cutting forests, turning forests into agricultural land and turning farmlands into urban spaces. Humans think there is more where the last bit came from. The economic system has facilitated the unplanned mining of non-renewable resources and the planned use of renewable resources often beyond the point of replenishment.

In the process of converting the resources for everyday use wastes are produced both at the stage of production as well as consumption. Wastes are regularly dumped into open spaces, beneath the ground, into open waters and oceans and emitted into the atmosphere.

Two things are happening as a cumulative result of this. First, resources are becoming more and more scarce and society does not have

LAND REFORMS IN LEFT REGIME

A Probe into West Bengal's
Socio-Economic Perspective
1977-2011

by **Manas Bakshi**
Price : Rs 195

Allied Publishers Pvt Ltd
Kolkata, Mumbai, New Delhi,
Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad,
Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Nagpur

alternatives in place yet. Second, the enormous pollution from wastes produced are also spoiling natural resources like fresh water, clean air, or the fertility of land. In short, Nature is being destroyed and diminished. The most talked about aspect of this crisis is perhaps Climate Change which is being brought about by carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases emitted through human economic activities of production and consumption. Other damaging signs like the sixth mass extinction of species, ocean acidification, freshwater scarcity, disrupted bio-geo-chemical cycles and the large impact of chemicals coming into our bodies through processed food, through cosmetics and polluted air. Capitalism's business as usual has brought society to this existential crisis, yet business as usual continues without much urgency about the impending disaster. A couple of points need to be noted at this point. The first is that individual awareness and changing one's lifestyle can be a solution if and only if everyone thinks and acts in the same way. It is a global problem requiring a global solution. If the voluntary solution is deemed to be difficult then the only alternative is collective global governance. Attempts at this, over the last two or three decades have not been very successful at all, as even the latest Paris Accord seems to indicate. There is great faith in the marvels of progress. People believe that technological solutions would come about before any major disaster strikes. It is time now to look at technology.

The Rise and Rise of Technology

One feature of the history of capitalism has been the persistent and sometimes quite dramatic technological changes that constantly affect the ways we work and enjoy

leisure. Starting with powered locomotion, electricity, radio, television, cars, air conditioners, and not to mention the breath-taking developments in the world of medicine and surgery, all have contributed to transforming lives of ordinary people. More recently, the advent of the computer and the internet have accelerated these changes. New products, newer versions of older products, new apps, faster connectivity, instant global access to information and markets: these are some of the changes one takes for granted.

Every technological change has some de-humanising aspect: it displaces human labour and effort, and with it a part of the dignity of work and the associated traditional norms and mores of human labour. Recall, for instance, the famous ballad of John Henry. Henry was a railway construction worker and found himself being displaced by a steam drill. He competed with the drill to show that he was as good and efficient as the drill. In the competition he died from trying too hard. Slowly but surely, over decades and centuries a large part of the tedious human efforts in production have been removed, where efficient machines have taken over from humans. The assembly line in factories has been instrumental in reducing human errors, while maintaining uniformity of quality, while also speeding up the process of production. For the homemaker the washing machine has liberated her from the drudgery of washing clothes. Instances are too large to list.

The more recent information and communication revolution of the past three four decades has changed many more things in a hurry—the way we communicate, how we get news about the world, and how we entertain ourselves, gather knowledge and verify facts. In the process

many new kinds of jobs have opened up: the computer programmers, the code writers, the analysts, the web designers as well the hardware and software engineers who man the entire computer industry. Computers design products to perfection. Life without a computer (or at least a smart-phone) is unimaginable. There is news and sometimes glimpses of new things on the anvil that will transform our lives in the next two or three decades. The grapevine has it that the most startling developments will come from the fields of bio-technology and nano-technology—things to do with living beings and things that will get smaller and smaller. In this context the terms Artificial Intelligence, machine Learning and Robotics along with Quantum Computing are being heard quite frequently.

In a nutshell, the new technologies will be able to do existing human or even existing-technology based machine-work much faster and with complete accuracy. For instance, these machines could drive cars, wait on dinner tables, or assist in complicated surgical procedures. These machines are referred to as forged labourers who can do work at amazing speed and accuracy and do it 24x7. That is only one aspect of the new technology. The new machines, when fed a large amount of data, can figure out the best way to do a task, and make predictions. These machines cannot only take decisions, but also execute them. These machines are called synthetic intellects. Though not available immediately, these are on the horizon in a couple of decades. In other words, these machines with intelligence can replace workers irrespective of the colour of their collars—blue or white. This will be a new inevitability. The world is seeing the nascent stage of development of inorganic life. What is estimated

currently is that the jobs displaced will be far in excess of new jobs created. What the future foretells in this context is that new technology might make a large number of people jobless and quite useless as far as the economy is concerned. How they will be sustained and what kind of social problems will arise out of this is anyone's guess. If there is trouble some power has to control and contain it.

The Tight Knit of the Political and the Economic

The political structure of representative democracy that goes hand in hand with the development of capitalism suffers from a number of constraints that are far away from the formal elements of equality, inclusion and freedom. As the economic system tends to mature the more economic power gets concentrated in the hands of a few business houses and corporations. These are powerful in the sense that they control a substantial share of the markets in the economy. The politicians who represent the people focus on the next election and how might they win it and return to political power for another period of time. Winning elections means a lot of propaganda, campaigning, influence in the electronic, print and social media, along with pampering of different lobbies who ask for special favours in lieu of electoral support. These, in turn, require massive amounts of money to spend for the support required to win (and often control) elections. Somewhere, the development of capitalism converts the promise of the future benefits for ordinary citizens into illusions of prosperity. Slowly, people begin to realise that the promises will not be kept. Potential frustration and anguish can foment into social and political violence. To suppress this the business bosses, want a political system that is subservient

to their wishes and can do whatever they want provided the rich and powerful are protected. Hence there is a win-win situation for the political system and big business. It is a symbiotic relationship that feeds on one another. Faces and names of leaders and firms might change, but the essence of the relationship remains the same. One difficulty with the formal liberty of democracy is that if a social group (say a political party) questions the very foundations of liberal democracy, then the system is unable to handle that kind of difference in opinion.

Given these trends, the political system becomes corrupt, completely subservient to the economic powers, controls as much as possible ideas and news that come into the public domain, and finally, become more experienced with false promises, deceits and lies. If these fail, or in times of social unrest, the system is ready to suppress dissent with force and violence. The formal structure remains free and fair, but the real substance is meaningless to the extent that the system can ever be critically questioned. Not only that, even a critique of existing practices, policies or laws can be stifled ruthlessly if needed by the use of state violence and humiliation like turning the taxman, or other investigative arms of government systematically against the citizenry. The political system serves its purpose by doing a number of things: serving and protecting the interests of the rich and economically powerful, ensuring political control of the voting mechanism, feeding ordinary people with illusive goals and limited opportunities, and finally stabilising markets through taxation and monetary policies to keep the economic ship from rocking too much. It is in these senses that the economic and the political threads of capitalism are tightly interwoven.

Controlling Beliefs and Ensuring Consent

What is being witnessed today is a crisis of capitalism: chronic economic and financial instability and a world-wide rise in authoritarian, illiberal governments. Liberal democracy is on the backfoot against a wave of right-wing governments with fascists ideologies. This political trait is a consequence of the inability of capitalism to deliver long-term benefits to the ordinary citizen: not adequate improvements in living standards, not job and livelihood security, nor protection from global crisis like climate change, or internecine war and nuclear annihilation.

To keep the capitalist system going, the state has to be increasingly illiberal. Control is the key word. First of all, the state has to control public opinion and beliefs. This is done systematically by the business's control of media and by persistent government propaganda and national aggrandisement. The second line of defence, if this is not enough, is the use of force such as police, security forces, and even the armed forces if needed. During the last 6 to 7 decades when the world has not seen a major global war, each country's spending on internal security and policing has gone up manifold. New laws have come into force that protect the state against the dissenting citizen, some of them quite draconian in nature. Finally, to keep the control really tight and fool-proof, new technologies are used for surveillance of citizens' behaviour and actions, from what they buy, who they talk to, which books they read, which website they visit and which places they visit. Indeed, this private data about citizens are needed by both business and government for different purposes and there will be a struggle by both these institutions to gather data fast,

and analyse them for patterns and predictions. Dissent is usually generated initially by intellectuals and thinkers, and then by victims of state actions and deprivations. That is why authoritarian governments are highly suspicious of intellectuals. The surveillance technologies help the government keep a tab over thinkers and activists.

To achieve all this as smoothly as possible, the state must be able to create an enemy, an enemy that is fairly near and tangible—a racial or religious minority, immigrants (current or from the past) or a geographical neighbor with whom the state has disturbed relationships. It is claimed that the good times for society can only follow when this enemy (or enemies) are annihilated or at least completely subjugated. The good times will not be something newly constructed (because most people are not credulous of future images) but a reimagining of an indefinite but glorious past. This past (the golden age) is carefully constructed with a set of lies and half-truths. Democracy has a built-in advantage for this transition to authoritarianism: it is the power of the majority rule. The political majority can be created through propaganda or through influencing voting outcomes—could be supporters of a strong demagogic leader, could be a racial or religious majority, or a carefully constructed ideological majority. The economic crisis and the political crisis have become all too visible.

Through the Mists of the Present

Extreme economic inequality is toxic to liberal democracy. Yet this inequality is inevitable given the economic logic of capitalism. Inequality breeds delusions that mask reality undermining the possibility of joint deliberations to solve society's divisions. Those who benefit from

large inequalities are inclined to believe that they have earned their privilege. Those who demonstrably do not benefit from inequalities can be made to believe that they do, like in USA racism is used to ensnare poor white citizens into supporting tax cuts for the extravagantly rich minority, just for sharing the same colour of skin.

Liberal equality implies that those with different levels of power and wealth nevertheless are regarded as having equal worth to society. Political equality, is by definition, positioned to be compatible with economic inequality. And yet when economic inequality becomes extreme, then the myths used to sustain the equivalence of the political and the economic, begin to crumble. Then, to completely destroy the previous (though mythical) reality authoritarian politics replaces the liberal ideal with the opposite of equality: hierarchy.

To some people, the precariousness of the present moment appears frightening. Yet this seed of uncertainty was always there during the last two hundred years or so. Capitalism never promised anything permanent or stable. Indeed, instead, liberal democracy demanded many things from citizens: participation, debate, effort, duties. A degree of tolerance was required for some amount of chaos and cacophony. Capitalism has always altered lives, destroyed livelihoods, break up families, disrupted lifestyles, and, above all, influenced the way people accepted the world around them—the social, natural, political and economic. There is one difference from the perceptive expectations of the past and the current moment is that the contemporary shadows are darker and contain existential threats—the environmental disasters looming shows that humanity might be reaching the end

of the rope of using nature mindlessly, a world filled with weapons of mass destruction that finish off the world in an afternoon of blinding light and heat, the arrival of technologies that are likely to take much of the human jobs over, and might overwhelm us as a species.

Yet, nihilism is the worst bad habit of the human spirit. It is not the first time in history people proclaim (despite the threat of consequences) that 'all politicians are crooks', 'all journalists are liars' 'all businesses are corrupt'. It has happened in the past where nations have faced deep skepticism, anti-politics, whatever-ism. This was called 'qualunquismo' in post-war Italy. Modern history has sensitised people to the fact that alternative visions of our nations try to draw us in. But maybe, picking one's way through the darkness, it might be possible to resist the gloom. It is not clear where humanity is headed towards. But there must still be a way to construct something better and human. □□□

Bibliography

- Applebaum, Anne (2020): *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism*, Doubleday, New York.
- Kaplan, Jerry (2015): *Humans Need Not Apply: A Guide to Wealth and Work in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*, Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Stanley, Jason (2018): *How Fascism Works: The Politics of US and THEM*, Random House New York.
- Zuboff, Shoshana (2019): *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, Profile Books, UK.

Readers are requested to note the changed address (new) of our website
www.frontierweekly.com

MANY LOOSE ENDS

South Asia in Crisis*Sushil Khanna**

AS THE SPECTRE OF THE pandemic receded and economies around the world opened once again, much of South Asia was engulfed in a severe debt and balance of payments crisis. The most dramatic was the case of Sri Lanka. Unable to repay its creditors, Sri Lanka was shut out of all foreign financing. The supply of essential imports like fuel, food and even domestic transport of farm produce collapsed, leading to hoarding, and a steep jump in prices of essentials from 40 to 200 percent. The crisis paralysed the economy, shutting schools and offices and as anger mounted, people invaded the President's palace, and the top leadership fled the country.

Pakistan faced a similar situation of imminent debt default a few months later. First signs of economic distress emerged soon after Prime Minister's Imran Khan's government was defeated in a parliamentary vote, and a new government took over. The crisis again manifested itself as a foreign exchange crisis and reserves declined to a record low, while cost of imports, especially petroleum zoomed, thanks to the Ukraine war. It reached its peak in March 2023 as the value of Pakistani rupee declined and prices were rising at the rate of 40 percent per month. As Pakistan had not fulfilled its part of the bargain with International Monetary Fund as per the 2019 bailout, there was little to hope of an early repeat bailout. High inflation, a weakening currency, and dangerously low foreign exchange reserves, along with the high cost of doing business, intensified the grim economic out-

look. Moody's Investor Service, in its latest report, warned of a possible default of \$7 billion in repayments due in the coming months.

The Pakistan's rupee depreciated to a record low of Rs 287 per USD, (from Rs 140; 1 USD in 2019), following the delay in the negotiations over the conditions for concluding the agreement with the IMF to unlock a \$6.5 billion loan. To avoid debt default Pakistan sought commitments for new loans from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. "We have received an indication from Saudi Arabia about getting something", the Pakistan Minister of State for Finance said in March end. Pakistan was to repay about \$3 billion of debt by June. Meanwhile, the State Bank of Pakistan raised the key interest rate by 100bps to an all-time high level of 21 percent on April 4 (after a 300bps hike in March), aiming to tackle record inflation and stabilise the economy. Pakistan's economic crisis would have deepened if the International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout was refused. Total foreign reserves had fallen to \$9.82 billion with the State Bank of Pakistan holding only \$4.24 billion, which was enough to pay for just three weeks of imports.

What has happened in Sri Lanka and Pakistan is not so exceptional in the region. Seemingly, the war in Ukraine and the subsequent spike in petroleum and food prices seemed to be the immediate cause of the crisis that has propelled India's neighbours—Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to approach the IMF for assistance under its Extended Fund Facility (EFF) to shore up their fast-depleting foreign exchange reserves.

What is the basic reason and structural weakness that have plunged South Asia region into crisis? Could India be, being the region's largest economy, play any important role of assisting its neighbours?

Despite the historical reality that till the middle of 20th century, South Asia was an integrated market under British control, it is surprising to see the high fragmentation and very low economic integration, low trade and economic relations in South Asia.

On the one hand, South Asia has close geographical proximity and the existence of bilateral and multi-lateral free trade agreements (SAPTA / WTO), on the other, it is one of the least economically integrated regions in the world. Intra-regional trade in South Asia accounts for barely 5 percent of the region's global trade. This makes South Asia one of the most disconnected regions in the world, especially when compared with other regions such as East Asia and the Pacific, where intra-regional trade accounts for approximately 50 percent of the total trade, and Sub-Saharan Africa, where intra-regional trade has improved over the years to 22 percent. Intra-regional trade in the South Asian region (including Myanmar) amounts to only 5.6 percent (2017).

In fact, all South Asian countries trade on better terms with distant economies than with their own neighbours. This can be shown through an index of trade restrictiveness. Based on global trade data, such an index generates an implicit tariff that measures a country's tariff and non-tariff barriers on imports. In India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, the indexes are two to nine times higher for imports from the South Asia region than for imports from the rest of the world!

In other words, instead of lowering duties and barriers to their South Asian neighbours, the SAARC countries discriminate against their immediate neighbours in favour of western imports.

The responsibility for this low integration lies with the 'big brother' India. Initially it was India's import substitution and industrialisation strategy launched in the late 1950s that disrupted historical trade flows and movement of people and services in the region. Rail and road connections too were disrupted as neighbours became enemies. Even after India opened to the world in 1990s, it remained wary of its immediate neighbours. Protectionist policies, high logistics cost and above all lack of political will and a trust deficit inhibited South Asian integration. What is more, India with contiguous land borders with almost all the countries of the region, hampered closer economic ties amongst them by discouraging overland movement of trucks and containers through Indian Territory. Thus, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh's efforts to boost intra-regional trade was made impossible as the goods needed to pass through India.

With India turning its back on economic integration, and even occasionally harassing neighbours by imposing blockades, the field was left open to other rivals. China stepped up its economic engagement and offered concessional trade credit to sweeten its entry into the South Asian market. Some like Pakistan had a long strategic and dependent relationship with China, but other South Asian countries too turned to China. In 2018, China's trade with SAARC countries (other than India) is approximately double that of India. Compared to India's total exports of US\$ 30 bn to its seven neighbours, China exports are at US\$ 60 bn. Even if Pakistan is excluded

- given its long-term dependence on China, and the embargo on Indian imports- China's trade with India's other neighbours is above US\$ 49 bn. Not surprisingly India's economic influence over its South Asian neighbours is limited.

Despite the 2006 South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA), there has been little progress. In SAFTA about 40 percent of India's imports have been on the 'sensitive list' where duties are not lowered. In addition, India has launched the world's second largest anti-dumping investigations and imposed restrictions indiscriminately against all trade partners. Though the largest number of such investigations are against Chinese imports, even South Asian neighbours have faced anti-dumping duties restrictions. Anti-dumping tariffs and restrictions have been imposed on imports of jute goods from Nepal and Bangladesh, on float glass and car batteries from Bangladesh; on Vanaspati from Nepal and Sri Lanka. Similarly other countries which already have a large trade deficit with India have imposed duties and restrictions. Since 2019, Pakistan has banned Indian imports. All this has pushed South Asian neighbours to trade with China and ASEAN countries.

Another surprising feature of SAARC economies is the similarity in their economic structures and weaknesses. All SAARC countries have been poor exporters of manufactured goods and services, although India with its expanding service exports is partly filling up the persisting very large deficit in goods. All the countries of South Asia have continuous and large trade deficits. Pakistan has the largest trade deficits with imports being twice its exports, but others too run large deficits. So how do they finance their imports?

Unable to provide jobs for the

teeming millions, South Asian countries provide for the largest outward migration of poorly educated workers, mainly to the Gulf oil producing countries, including nurses, construction labour and domestic workers. Thus, India accounts for about 5 million migrant workers (not including skilled software personnel), Pakistan has 3.3 million while Bangladesh has 2.1 million and Sri Lanka has 7 lakh, while Nepal has 5 lakh (not counting migrants to India across the open border).

Flowing from this large labour migration, South Asian economies receive large remittances from these poor workers who slave to feed their families back home. India is the world's largest recipient of remittances at \$ 90-100 billion a year. But Pakistan and Bangladesh too are amongst the top 10 countries in the world. This partly fills the gap created in their balance of payments by poor export capacity and large trade deficits.

As Table 1 shows, all South Asian countries have significantly large trade deficits. For all of them, remittances were significant to fill in the deficit caused by trade deficits.

In the case of India, remittances in 2021 filled in the entire trade deficit. In case of Nepal and Bhutan the trade deficit was largely with India and financed with Indian aid (grants and credits). The remaining three, namely Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka had current account deficits as large as 3.5-3.8 percent of GDP. That is because all three have incurred large interest payments on account of government and private sector international borrowings that are often as large as 40 percent of their export earnings. This fact explains their large current account deficits despite large remittances. What is more none of them, unlike India, were able to attract significant foreign investment. Hence

Table 1

South Asia: Key Indicators from Balance of Payments Accounts 2021

Item	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Nepal	Pakistan	S. Lanka
Trade Balance+(\$ bn) (% of GDP)	-26.6 (6.4)	-0.53 (20.8)	-79.2 (2.5)	-12.1 (33.4)	-31.11 (8.9)	-6.5 (7.4)
Remittances (\$ bn) (% of GDP)	22.2 (5.3)	0.7 (12.9)	89.3 (2.8)	8.2 (22.7)	31.3 (9.0)	5.5 (6.2)
Current Acc Balance (\$ bn) (% of GDP)	-15.01 (3.8)	-0.32 (12.0)	-33.4 (1.1)	-5.3 (14.80)	-12.26 (3.5)	-3.3 (3.7)

[Source: World Bank : World Development Indicators +Trade in Goods and Services]

borrowing was from global financial markets or bilateral and multilateral assistance.

Sri Lanka and Pakistan

Both Pakistan and Sri Lanka have been beneficiaries of China's aid as loan and credit to finance infrastructure investment as part of the 'Belt and Road' projects. Repayment of these loans became due as several of these projects were commissioned. These repayments coincided with the global hike in energy prices.

As economies opened after the Covid lockdown, the war in Ukraine pushed up prices of oil and gas which for all South Asian countries form a significant proportion of their imports. Current account deficits widened for all countries. They needed to be financed or imports needed to be restricted, which the countries found difficult to do.

But what caused the total breakdown in Sri Lanka and Pakistan? It is argued that both countries were limited in their response because of their own respective political economies. In both these countries, it is the elite capture of policies and the breakdown of governance that were key factors.

Pakistan, for two decades or more, has been unable to manage its balance of payments, especially after 1998 nuclear bomb explosion. As the West imposed sanctions and official aid dried up, a panic-stricken government froze all foreign cur-

rency accounts held by non-resident Pakistanis. These NRP foreign currency accounts had remained insensitive to changes in economic fundamentals. However, poor decisions by the government in relation to the freeze on these accounts, added to the pressure caused by shrinkage of official flows consequent on the undermining of the 'rentier' value of Pakistan in the region's geo-politics, produced a sharp fall in foreign currency inflows and precipitated the financial crisis. Even today, Pakistan finds it difficult to attract deposits and investments from its non-resident citizens. According to media reports Pakistan faces capital flight through illegal channels.

Since 1954, the IMF has been forced to support Pakistan 24 times. But according to many Pakistani economists, the liberal and massive American aid that poured into Pakistan in the 1980s, as the country joined US campaign to oust Soviet backed regime in Afghanistan, infected Pakistan with the Dutch Disease like effect. The easy money meant governments ignored domestic resource mobilisation, and inflow of liberal foreign exchange raised the value of Pakistani rupee undermining industries and exports.

Since the beginning of the new millennium and especially after the attack on the World Trade Centre 2001, Pakistan once again began to receive foreign assistance (reminiscent of cold war days), not so

much bilateral aid, but support from the IMF and the World Bank. Pakistan has lurched from one bailout to another with occasional episodes of large assistance from Saudi Arabia and China.

What is more successive governments have ignored IMF conditions to raise more domestic resources. Thus, 11 out of 12 IMF programmes since 1988 were abandoned in the middle or scrapped altogether — and the country has become known as a "start-stop adjuster". Governments have tried to "game" the IMF, and achieved partial success each time. This time too, the IMF programme of 2019, as large as 6 bn dollars was on hold as the country's governments continued to ignore the conditions agreed with IMF.

The recent crisis was triggered by the fact that the war in Ukraine coincided with the political instability when Prime Minister Imran Khan was replaced by Shahbaz Sharif. That uncertainty grew whether the government would survive the forthcoming election.

Aggravating the crisis were unsustainable subsidies on power and fuel which the politics of the country made difficult to reduce. It precipitated the suspension of the 2019 IMF bailout programme. Deepening the crisis, Pakistan's tax collection has been low by South Asian standards, with governments able to collect only 10 percent of GDP. The Pakistani elite, like their other South Asian compatriots are adept at avoiding taxes. Moreover, the government has been reducing tax rates, to attract investments. Also, Pakistan's saving, and investment rate has been amongst the lowest at 14 percent of GDP, compared to 30 percent for Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India.

For years, Pakistan has lived beyond its means with large exter-

nal sector imbalances – namely large trade and current account deficits which required it to constantly borrow from friends and commercial financial markets. It has failed to attract foreign investments and faces capital flight with rich Pakistanis buying property and assets in Gulf economies. Unable to meet its debt obligations, Pakistan would repeatedly approach the IMF for support.

Pakistan's external debt exceeds \$124 billion amounting to about 40 percent of its GDP. What is more, 30 percent of its external debt is owed to China, which too has been generous in granting loans to bag construction contracts for its companies, but it has become shy about deferring repayments. Most recently, China has agreed to defer \$2 bn loan repayment and provided \$700 million as emergency assistance.

The case of Sri Lanka is curious. After the civil war in 2009, the Rajapaksa family consolidated their hold on the government and embarked on a rapid growth strategy. The country embarked mainly on a bilaterally financed infrastructure investment programme. Alongside these borrowings for investments in ports, energy, and transport, the Sri Lankan government also borrowed by issuing international sovereign bonds (ISB). Some \$17 billion worth of ISBs were issued from 2007 to 2019 which carried high interest rates, often as high as 8 to 9 percent in dollar terms.

On being elected as the President in November 2019, the Gotabaya Rajapaksa administration instead of tightening the belt, slashed direct taxes. Personal income tax exemption was raised from Rs. 5 lakh p.a to Rs. 30 lakh p.a. Similarly, corporate tax was reduced from 30 to 24 percent, agro-based companies (tea plantations) and IT companies were exempt from tax. Value added tax (VAT) was reduced

from 15 percent to 8 percent. Furthermore, in the name of simplifying the tax system the government eliminated the Nation Building Tax, the Economic Service Charge, and the Debt Repayment Levy. In a bid to boost Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), the government removed all restrictions under the Strategic Development Projects Act, and firms executing projects deemed strategically important were granted tax exemptions for up to 25 years (many were Chinese funded projects).

By 2020, largely because of these populist measures to please the rich and the corporate elite, Sri Lanka's tax-to-GDP ratio fell to a historic low of 8.1 percent in 2020 and is now among the lowest in the world. These cuts even alarmed the IMF, which generally favours tax reduction, as they sharply increased budget deficits and the excess demand leading to a sharp increase in imports. The Covid lockdown and disruptions further reduced revenue collection and required the government to increase social expenditure.

Following reckless borrowing, the country's external debt rose to \$ 58 bn or 65 percent of its current GDP from 29 percent of its GDP by 2019. The share of ISBs in total debt tripled to 36 percent by 2022 from 12 percent in 2019. What is more, the 36 percent debt on ISBs, accounted for 70 percent of the interest payment. Soon it was forced to default on its commercial debt and all short-term funding evaporated. This debt default – announced in April 2022 amid foreign currency shortages, triggered blackouts, fuelled queues, and street protests, which forced the Rajapaksa brothers to flee the country. This resulted in shutting off all foreign loans accompanied by capital flight from the stock market as well as illegal capital flight by Sri Lankan nationals, both residents and non-residents.

India provided short term loans of about \$ 1 bn to buy Indian commodities including petroleum products and supported the Sri Lanka's application for IMF - EFF assistance. China, which like in the case of Pakistan, accounts for 20 percent of the loans dragged its feet, delaying the IMF agreement.

The crisis in South Asia points to the high cost the region has paid due to political differences and suspicion resulting in the failure to see the gains from closer economic integration. India as the largest economy had an opportunity to help develop its neighbours who would have provided a growing market for its goods, several fold larger than the current paltry total of \$ 30 bn. A unified and integrated South Asia would carry greater heft and long-term resilience, facing climate change to security and economic challenges together. Rather than look to western markets and funds for development South Asia needs to look towards its immediate neighbours. South Asia's salvation lies in peace and closer economic ties with each other. □□□

Kathuria, S. (Ed.). (2018). *A glass half full: The promise of regional trade in South Asia*. World Bank Publications

Ibid

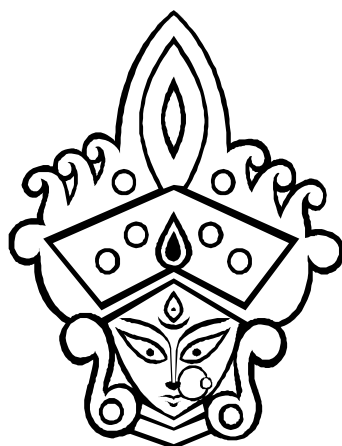
Editor's note: Officially the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) comprises of eight countries, including later entrant Afghanistan.

Khan, M. Z. (2009). *Liberalisation and economic crisis in Pakistan. Rising to the Challenge in Asia: A Study of Financial Markets*: Asian Development Bank, 9.

Ehtisham Ahmad and Azizali Mohammed (2012), "Pakistan, the United States and the IMF: Great game or a curious case of Dutch Disease without the oil?" LSE Asia Research Centre Working Paper 57

* An earlier version of this article appeared in 'Zuva', the magazine of 'Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy'.

*With Best
Compliments From:*



CALCUTTA SHIPPING BUREAU

CUSTOM HOUSE AGENT

2, Church Lane, 3rd Floor, Room No. 304A, Kolkata-700001

Fax : 2248-2789

Ring : 2238-9603/586, 2210-8454, 2213-0201, 2231-7555/0739

Email: calship3@eth.net, calcuttashippingbureau@gmail.com

CHANGING AGRARIAN SCENARIO

Revamping Indian Agriculture

I Satya Sundaram

AGRICULTURE PROSPERITY is the key to rural prosperity. In India, nearly 70 percent of the population still lives in villages. Farming is both a way of life and the principal source of livelihood for nearly two-thirds of Indian population. As such, it is not sagacious to skirt India's Rs \$ 600 billion worth agriculture.

According to some studies, over 40 percent of farmers would like to quit their occupation, if they have an option. Some changes are taking place in agriculture sector. For instance, horticulture output in 2021-22 at 336 million tonnes (MT) outpaced food-grain production at 316 MT. The stress on productivity is also welcome. However, the changes should benefit small and marginal farmers, tenant farmers and agricultural labourers.

Using land productively is also important. Experts say there are no waste lands, only wasted lands. Of course, when there are substantial gains in productivity, some land can be diverted to non-agriculture use. Between 2001-02 and 2011-12, one million hectares (MH) were diverted for other purposes.

In India, subsidies are on the high side—fertiliser subsidy, Rs 2.76 lakh crore, and food subsidy Rs 2.37 lakh crore. Is free power yielding good results? Economists suggest it is necessary to recast farm subsidies. Market distorting fertiliser and power subsidies should go. Instead, the amount saved should be used to promote non-market distorting support as it would enhance farmers' incomes.

While the number of farming households increased from 90 mil-

lion to 93 million between 2013 and 2019, the number of families not engaged in farming increased from 66 million to nearly 80 million in the same period. This means, for most farmers, agriculture is un-re-munerative. They are searching for non-farm sources of income.

Agriculture share in employment generation declined from 69.40 percent in 1951 to 43 percent in 2021. However, agriculture and allied sectors constitute the major source of livelihood for more than half of the population. Even now, around 54 percent of the total workforce derives its sustenance from direct employment in agriculture either as cultivators or as agricultural labourers.

In the Global Food Security Index 2021, India ranks 71st out of 113 countries. Food security (FS) means that food is available at all times, that all persons have means of access to it, that it is nutritionally adequate in terms of quantity, quality and variety and that it is acceptable within the given culture.

It needs to be noted that food security and food-grain security are not one and the same. There is enough food grain stocks. With the change in food habits, people are facing serious shortage of non-food-grain items. Even the poor are devoting around 60 percent of food expenditure on non-food-grain items like edible oils, sugar, milk, meat, eggs, vegetables and fruits.

Indian agriculture has shown remarkable resilience. When the overall growth rate was declining, agriculture experienced an average growth rate of 4.8 percent GVA (gross value added) in the last five

years—significantly higher than the GVA growth of the economy as a whole at 3.6 percent during the same period.

Food-grain Production (in MT)

Year	Production
2014-15	252.0
2015-16	251.5
2016-17	275.1
2017-18	285.0
2018-19	285.2
2019-20	297.5
2020-21	310.7
2021-22	315.7*
2022-23	323.5*

*estimates

The size of the agricultural holdings is becoming smaller. Farming in India is dominated by marginal (1 to 2 hectare land holdings) and small farmers (below 1 hectare). They account for nearly 86 percent of all the farmers in the country, but own just 47.3 per cent of the crop area. In comparison, semi-medium and medium landholding farmers, owning between 2 to 10 hectares account for 13.2 percent of all farmers, but own 43.6 percent of crop area. Some studies indicate small farmers are more efficient, especially in cultivating labour-intensive crops or keeping livestock. However, landholdings are too small to generate sufficient household income. Small farmers are generally economically impoverished, earning only 39 percent of what medium holders earn, and only 13 percent of what large holders earn.

According to the National Sample Survey (77th Round, 2019), 50.2 percent of agri-households in India are in debt and an average household has debt equivalent to 60 percent of its annual income. The annual income of farm household was Rs 1.23 lakh, and the average debt was Rs 71,100 from July 2018 to June 2019.

**Average Monthly Income per
Agriculture Household in
some States**

State	Average Monthly Income (Rs)
Meghalaya	29,348
Punjab	26,701
Haryana	22,841
Kerala	17,915
Karnataka	13,441
Gujarat	12,631
Rajasthan	12,520
Tamil Nadu	11,924
Maharashtra	11,492
Andhra Pradesh	10,480
Telangana	9,403
West Bengal	6,762

NSS Report No. 582, Year, 2019

Official data show that real incomes from cultivation have fallen in absolute terms after 2015. Between 2020-21 and 2022-23, annual growth rates in agriculture and allied sectors have been stagnant between 3 percent and 3.5 percent. Experts say the cut in food and fertiliser subsidies would worsen the plight of farmers. The Budget 2023-24 reduced the food subsidy from Rs 2.87 lakh crore in 2022-23 (BE) to Rs.1.97 lakh crore in 2023-24 (RE). Fertiliser subsidies have also been cut from Rs 2.25 lakh crore to Rs 1.75 lakh crore.

Major Problems

Indian agriculture is greatly handicapped by low productivity, limited diversification, inadequate irrigation facilities, poor marketing facilities, post-harvest losses, unhelpful minimum support price (MSP) and crop insurance scheme, capricious use of scarce resources like water, price volatility, climate aberrations and machinations of the middlemen.

There has been a steep fall in incomes of farm households from agriculture. According to NSS (2019), the average monthly income stood at Rs 10,218. The maximum (Rs 4,063) came from wages; Rs

798 from crop cultivation and production; Rs 1,582 from animal farming. Farmers owning less than one acre get a monthly income of Rs 6,400. Most farmers depend on wage work, animal farming, non-farm business and land lease.

The crop procurement scheme is defective. Procurement has benefited only two crops, wheat and paddy. Wheat procurement increased from 51 lakh tonnes (LT) in 1975-76 to 390 LT in 2020-21. During this period, paddy procurement also increased from 35 LT to 380 LT. Such procurement advantage is not available to coarse cereals, pulses and oilseeds. Even in respect of wheat and paddy, procurement has been uneven across the States. Also, for long the procurement of crop has not been linked to the production of different States. Also, the Government procurement agencies come late in the market and by the time procurement starts, most farmers sell out their produce to private players. The Centre should study the practical utility of MSP. Produce should be procured at MSP at the right time. Muzzling the middlemen is also important.

The subsidized fertilisers are not scientifically utilised. For instance, against the prescribed N: K: P ratio of 4:1:6:1, in Punjab, the actual usage was 33.9:7.9:1—a serious imbalance. There should be judicious use of farm inputs. Fertiliser use efficiency can be improved by around 80 percent through fertigation. The yields may go up 25 to 50 percent. Nutrients and water are supplied near the active root zone through fertigation.

Food wastage impacts the poor, raises food prices and hurts the environment. Losses and wastes contribute 8 to 10 percent of world's greenhouse gas emissions. Globally, around 14 percent of the food is wasted. Developing countries account

for 44 percent of the 1.3 billion tonnes of global food loss. India accounts for 7 percent of global food waste. Post-harvest losses are estimated at Rs 2 lakh crore per annum. Products like tomatoes are often thrown on the roads because the farmers could not get even the transport costs. The Budget 2023-24 announced India will have world's largest decentralised storage capacity in the cooperative sector which will help farmers store their produce and sell at the right time to get a fair price.

The use of genetically modified (GM) crops has become polemical. Some have advanced a case for GM technology to boost output. The hybrids require modern chemical fertilisers, tractors and other farm equipment. The focus of the green revolution is on the rich farmers. One vital aspect of hybrid was their lack of reproductive capacity. Farmers have to buy seed every year. Experts say research should go beyond crops.

The role of Research & Development (R&D) as a driver of economic growth is well-known. Yet, India continues to neglect this segment. India's gross expenditure on R & D is low at 0.7 percent of GDP. For OECD countries, it is above 2.5 percent. The Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) has recommended enhancing the public spending on R & D in agriculture to a modest level of 1 percent of the agricultural gross value added (GVA), against just 0.6 percent now. A research study (Gulati et al 2018) has shown that every rupee spent on agriculture R & D yields higher returns (11.2), whereas it is 0.88 in the case of fertiliser subsidy, 0.79 in the case of power and 0.97 in the case of education.

World Soil Day is observed on 5th December. For healthy plant growth, superior soils are needed.

Such soils help maintain a landscape that is more resilient to the impacts of droughts and floods. In India, nearly 3.7 MH suffer from nutrient loss in soil. The situation worsened because of excessive use of fertilisers and pesticides. The Government introduced Soil Health Card scheme in 2015. The Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana attempts to prevent soil erosion, improve regeneration of natural vegetation, rainwater harvesting and use of fertilisers and pesticides.

Measures Initiated/Needed

The too much importance given to water-intensive crops led to deterioration of soil health and over-exploitation of groundwater. Hence, farmers need to diversify cropping pattern to crops such as millets, oilseeds, fruits and vegetables and adopt integrated farming along with dairy, poultry and fisheries. However, diversification should take into account food security issue.

Indian agriculture badly needs precision farming (PF) which aims at improving efficacy of inputs for maximising yields. It is an approach where inputs are utilised in precise quantities to get increased yields. Of course, PF uses technologies like Global Positioning System (GPS), grid sampling, variable rate technology (VRT). Yield monitors, remote sensors and computer technology. The success of PF also depends on the kind of support from the Government.

The current focus is on Natural Farming (NF). Research is going on regarding the viability of NF. The Government has been promoting variants of NF. The Budget 2023-24 has allocated Rs 459 crore to a new National Mission on Natural Farming. One fear is, NF may reduce yields by 25 to 30 percent. If yields fall, farming cannot stay viable.

However, some case studies have demonstrated that NF is a profitable

proposition. It needs to be noted that NF too involves some costs—cost of labour for fieldwork and cattle rearing, collection of dung and urine, and the preparation of Jeevamrutha (Article in Economic & Political Weekly, March 11, 2023. P, 28).

Over the next three years, the Government will facilitate one crore farmers to adopt NF for which Finance Minister unveiled a detailed plan. The PM Programme for Restoration, Awareness, Nourishment and Amelioration of Mother Earth (PM-PRANAM) will be launched to incentivise States to promote alternative fertilisers and balanced use of chemical fertilisers. The Agriculture Accelerator Fund announced by the Budget 2023-24, together with PM-PRANAM, is expected to provide necessary boost to NF. It is time to look at NF afresh, validate it scientifically and practise it on scale.

The food security is there, but India badly needs nutrition security. The current stress is on paddy and wheat though they are water-intensive crops. Pulses and coarse grains remain neglected. Production of fruits and vegetables is comfortable. People should increase their consumption.

The UN declared 2023 as the International Year of the Millets. Millets are climate resilient staple food crops grown in dry-land agriculture. They require less water than paddy, wheat, sugarcane, and are suitable for small farmers. India is the largest consumer of millets, and accounts for 38 percent of global demand. Food industry is being encouraged to launch millet-based products by providing sales based incentives.

In India, there is tremendous pressure on water resources. The average per capita water availability will decline from 1588 cubic metres to less than half of that by 2030. Water crisis continues. In India, dry-

land agriculture accounts for 68 percent of the area under cultivation and provides 44 percent of food requirement.

Augmenting water resources and judicious use of available water can transform agriculture, and make it remunerative. Yet, water is wasted. There is too much dependence on water-intensive crops and groundwater. The groundwater extraction in India increased from 58 percent to 63 percent between 2004 and 2017. The situation worsened because of climate change. Approximately, 54 percent of Indians are experiencing water scarcity.

For one thing India's performance is very poor on rainwater harvesting front. Rainwater is abundantly available during some months. Measures should be undertaken to conserve every drop of water. It is not a difficult task. In Kadwanchi (Maharashtra), a drought prone area, farmers wanted to conserve every drop of water. They grow grapes. The farmers use water judiciously. They now earn four times as much as the average income of farmers in the country (Business Line, June 1, 2018). In Rajasthan, small water bodies have been neglected for decades. Now, they have been brought under use. Waste water would be a future source. Micro irrigation reduces water use by 30 to 60 percent, depending on the method of irrigation employed (drip or sprinkler).

The current stress is on Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT). The Prime Minister's Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-Kisan) is a flagship central scheme launched in 2019 to pay eligible farmer families Rs 6,000 a year in three installments of Rs 2,000 each. A recent survey has revealed the scheme meets farmers' non-agriculture expenses too (Business Line, March 2, 2023).

The Government declared DBT

could save more than Rs 50,000 crore in 2021-22, up from Rs 44,000 crore in 2020-21. This is made possible mainly because of the elimination of 4.2 crore duplicate/fake ration cards during 2013 to 2021.

It is time the class of agri-entrepreneurs is provided all incentives. January 16 is National Start up Day. Young entrepreneurs are encouraged under ease of doing business. Adequate emphasis has been accorded on digital infrastructure for infusion of agriculture technologies in Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode. Tax incentives for agri-business benefit agriculture.

Climate change has affected agriculture also. The heat waves are reducing paddy and wheat output. In some parts of the country, there are droughts, in others, there are floods. Over 75 percent of India's districts are vulnerable to extreme climate. Apart from climate change, government policies proved counter-productive. For instance, Punjab accounts for 1.53 percent of land area of India. It uses about 23 percent of the total pesticides used in the country. Environmental problems are neglected.

India needs to rejuvenate around 30 MH by 2030. Economists say India can adopt sustainable traditional practices like crop rotation, using bio-fertilisers, and integrating pest management through the judicious use of pesticides. Of course, more funds are needed for adaptation of farming to climate change. The National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change (NAFCC) was established in 2015 to meet the cost of adaptation to climate change for the States.

Indian agriculture has become a victim of natural calamities like droughts and floods. Hence, crop insurance has special significance. Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) offers farmers compensa-

tion for crop losses arising from non-preventable risks. Farmers are expected to pay nominal premium (1.5 to 2 percent); the premium burden is equally shared between the Centre and the States. The States are not showing interest. They say while premiums are distributed evenly across participants, claims are cornered by a few.

An expert committee headed by Ashok Dalwai revealed between 2016 and 2021, PMFBY saw a decline in participating farmers (362 lakh to 248 lakh), and States (22 to 19), with shrinking coverage (474 to 387 LH), despite a sharp rise in premiums.

Access to institutional credit for our farmers needs to be stepped up. The Budget 2023-24 promised to increase agriculture credit target to Rs.20 lakh crore, with focus on animal husbandry, dairy and fisheries. The agriculture credit has increased from Rs 4.75 lakh crore in 2011-12, to Rs 18.5 lakh crore in 2022-23.

The performance of cooperative banks is good. They have achieved 95 percent of target in agriculture loans disbursed in 2021-22, accounting for 12.8 percent of the total agriculture loans. These loans increased from Rs 1,57,367 crore in 2019-20 to Rs 2,17,849 crore in 2021-22.

Of course, there has been misuse of agriculture credit. There is also skewed regional distribution of credit. Also, agriculture credit is directed towards production, while marketing and post-harvesting remain neglected.

The Government is depending on the new technology. Data collection through drones leads to resource efficient nutrient application. The data facilitates crop production forecast, and evidence-based planning. They are helpful in a number of spheres ---relief packages, water

use efficiency and irrigation, crop loss estimation. The farmers are given Rs 6,000 per hectare by the Government, if they hire drones from custom hiring centre.

There is a plea for regenerative farming. A project undertaken by Chennai-based food and agri-tech start-up, WayCool through its model farm Outgrow Agriculture Research Station (OARS) in regenerative farming has shown that cultivation costs can be reduced, while enriching the soil organic carbon value. Research revealed when the regenerative farming is integrated with right crop selection, know-how and resources, the results are rewarding. Crop diversification is the major principle of regenerative farming (Business Line, January 23, 2023).

The farmers should be provided with new sources of income. For instance, agri- tourism offers opportunities to farmers to get additional income. It is making progress. Agri-tourism includes a variety of activities and services. It is a low-investment, low-risk sector. Rural youth should be trained. Launching of an awareness programme is badly needed. Local administration should be strengthened.

Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) present the power of aggregation—farmers come together, form an organisation which collectively buys inputs and sells the produce. They assume importance because in India nearly 46 percent of land holdings are small, and contribute 51 percent of output. Strengthening FPOs will raise farmers' bargaining power and help them achieve economies of scale. The Government wants to promote 10,000 FPOs.

Cooperative farming has not become popular. Group farming should be encouraged. In Telangana, some women agriculture workers/farmers have sown the crop collectively, and shared the cost and the

income too collectively. These small groups enjoy financial and social autonomy by doing collective farming on leased land (*The Hindu*, March 8, 2021).

Scientists at the Central Research Institute for Dry-land Agriculture (CRIDA), an organ of ICAR, have developed an early warning system

called Farmers Distress Index. The index can sense imminent distress at least 3-4 months ahead of its actual occurrence, allowing to take preventive steps. It also indicates the level of distress (Business Line, April 17, 2023).

At the Agri & Commodity Summit 2023, arranged by Business Line

(January 6, 2023), Ashok Dalwai, CEO, National Rain-fed Area Authority (who headed the Committee on Doubling Farmers' Income), has said technology and more land to horticulture would double farmers' income. Also, Indian agriculture has to move from food security to nutrition security. □□□

ANSWERS FOR UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Gopal Sen: the Murder of a Vice-Chancellor

Amit Bhattacharya

THE CONTEXT: THE YEAR 1970 was coming to a close. The 'peal of spring thunder' has already crashed over India. The message of the agrarian revolution along the path charted by Mao Tse-tung had spread far and wide. The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) was born on 22 April 1969. Urban actions had started in the city of Kolkata from March 1970. On 2 March, 1970, students of Presidency College ransacked the room of the Principal, and decorated the wall with slogans and stenciled portrait of Mao. They demonstrated against the bureaucratic system of education at the nearby Calcutta University campus on the same day. On 16 March, President's Rule was declared in West Bengal which put an end to the United Front government of West Bengal. On 24 March, the offices of the Vice-Chancellors of both Jadavpur and Calcutta universities were ransacked and slogans such as "All reactionaries are paper-tigers", "Under this educational system, the more you read, the more foolish you become", 'Down with the rotten Yankee culture' were written on the walls. On April 10, the students of Jadavpur University invaded Gandhi Bhawan, an auditorium in JU, pulled down and destroyed a life-size portrait of Gandhiji, made a bonfire of a large number of books written by him as

also books written on him kept preserved in the library. Prof Hemchandra Guha, the then Vice-Chancellor of Jadavpur University resigned from the post taking moral responsibility. In his place, Prof Pratul Chandra Gupta, the Dean of Arts Faculty, joined as the Acting Vice-Chancellor. Later, Dr Gopal Chandra Sen, a Professor of the Mechanical Engineering Department, JU, was made the interim Vice Chancellor on August 7, 1970.

Situation within the JU campus

Clashes among groups of students—mainly between the Student Federation of the CPI (M) and the Naxalites leading to the suspension of classes became a regular feature. It was a period of pitched battles with hand-made bombs (known as 'peto') being used by both sides. Prof Uma Dasgupta, who taught history in JU, wrote: "Indeed, window panes did break as we sat in class learning and others were busy throwing bombs from the roof top. The bombs were not thrown at us, we had faith but at their opponents below('Memories', Re-union Department of History 1978 Jadavpur University Souvenir).

Meanwhile, on 29 April, 1970, one CPM activist was assaulted within the campus. The University closed the campus sine die on 30 April. On

that very night, Manik Das Mahapatra, a student of the Pharmacy Department and supporter of the Naxalite cause, was killed at the dining hall of the STP hostel allegedly by the CPI (M)-backed goondas. What was the role of the university authorities? The Registrar simply expressed his grief over the death, commenting that it was the inevitable consequence of party clashes.

Meanwhile, the date for the commencement of the Engineering Faculty was announced to be started from 2 September. Anticipating resistance from the side of the Naxalite students to the holding of examinations, the JU authority decided to depend on the CPI (M)-linked students union for the peaceful holding of examinations. In protest, students giving the call for boycott ransacked the office of the Controller of Examinations and made a bonfire of examination papers. The situation inside the campus was very tense, classes were frequently suspended and curriculum could not be covered. But the holding of examinations in proper time had to take place in the interest of students' career. Under such circumstances, the University had two options: either postpone the examination, or take it by allowing students with open license to copy. The authority opted for the second option—the only one feasible at that time (Telephonic conversation with Prof Pranab Banerjee, Retired Professor of Electrical Telecommunication Department, dt. 17.5.23).

Frontier carried an article captioned “Copy Book Examinations” By a Correspondent (September 26, 1970) parts of which are as follows: “Jadavpur University has been conducting its examinations in remarkable circumstances. Threatened by Naxalites who emphasised their point with an armed raid on the administrative block, this year’s belated engineering examinations seem to be taking place under an open general license or corruption. Examinees openly claimed and obtained the right to copy from books. In other rooms, students who walked out under Naxalite pressure, walked in again to finish their papers on the same terms. Even some leaders of the walk-out sat down with them... Many students took advantage of the unsettled atmosphere caused by repeated postponements of examinations and closure of hostels. The university authorities, anxious to get the examinations over in a crisis year, anticipated and connived at this”.

What was the role of the SF workers? The Correspondent wrote: “Activists of the CPM in the university complete this peculiar parallelogram of forces. Bent on a prestige victory over the Naxalites, the CPM-led union not only failed to take a stand against corruption in examination halls, but almost certainly encouraged it”. Anticipating that the Naxalites might create trouble during the examination, CPM students and sections of teachers and non-teaching staff affiliated to the CPM brought in rowdies from outside to ensure the holding of the examination. According to the Correspondent, when a teacher asked his student—a CPM worker—to keep outsiders outside, he politely refused. The Correspondent wrote: “He need not be blamed for following Mr Promode Dasgupta who stated more than once that his party’s private army is ready to handle the Naxalites

provided the police retire... No normal person on the campus relishes the dose of Dasgupta doctrine...” This was the situation inside the JU campus in late 1970. The completion of the examination process was followed by the Puja vacation which continued till October end.

The Murder and its Aftermath

The date was December 30, 1970. Prof Gopal Chandra Sen, the interim Vice-Chancellor, was returning home in the evening all alone after handing over charge to the Registrar along the campus. He was to rejoin the Mechanical Engineering Department next day. As he passed the central library and proceeded to the quarter in which he lived, he was suddenly attacked by five unknown assailants with iron rods and daggers and struck on the head with the rods and stabbed in the abdomen and fell down within 20 yards of his house in a pool of blood. His assailants escaped after scaling the boundary walls through the space between the jheel and the Faculty Club Guest House. The time of the incident was 6.30 PM. The darwan’s cry drew the attention of some students who were playing games in the indoor stadium nearby. He was first taken to his home and then to Ramkrishna Seva Pratisthan in a taxi. There he was pronounced dead.

The senior officials of the 24-Parganas Police including Mr Rathin Sengupta, District Magistrate, Mr Asok Chakravorty, Superintendent of Police, Mr Kalyan Chakravarty, DIG, Presidency Range, visited the place. A police dog was taken to the spot, but no clue could be found. Police sources said that the assailants appeared to be Naxalites (‘Jadavpur University Vice-Chancellor Stabbed to Death Campus Incident: Police Search for Assailants’ *The Statesman*, December 31, 1970; ‘Jadavpur VC Stabbed to Death’,

Hindusthan Standard, December 31, 1970; ‘Jadavpur Varsity V-C knifed to death Assailants escape Campus Tragedy’ By a Staff Reporter, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, December 31, 1970). The university officials told the reporters that they could not understand why such a popular teacher like Dr Sen should have been attacked. He did not have any personal enemy (*The Statesman*, *ibid*). One student told one reporter at the hospital gate that Mr Sen was very affectionate and before his death he had one day said that he would not die at the hands of students (*Hindusthan Standard*, *ibid*). The incident was condemned by many people and organizations. On December 31, the mortal remains of Prof Sen were taken from the Mominpur morgue to the university campus and from there a mile-long funeral procession carrying the body walked along different streets of south Calcutta on way to Keoratala burning ghat for cremation.

A condolence meeting was held in the university campus on January 1, 1971, at which Prof Triguna Sen, the first Rector of JU and the then Union Petroleum Minister, presided. Prof Sen stated that his firm belief was that the assailants of Prof Gopal Sen were branded criminals and they had been engaged by some men to commit the murder (‘Meeting Mourns death of Prof Gopal Sen’, *Hindusthan Standard*, January 2, 1971). Dr Triguna Sen remarked that those who committed his murder could never be students (‘Profound Shock over Prof Sen’s Death’, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, January 2, 1971).

Arrest of a Student and Driver

Two persons were arrested by the police on January 1 morning by the Calcutta police. One of them was Rana Bose, a third year Chemical Engineering student of JU; the other

was Prabhat Barik, a car driver. Rana Bose was the son of Dr Amiyo Bose, a renowned cardiologist, and Mrs Chameli Bose, a resident of Ballyganj in South Calcutta. Rana Bose was arrested from the house of his relative at Alipur and Barik from his house at Jheel Road in Santoshpur adjacent to Jadavpur.

It was also reported in the press that the police circles in Calcutta and 24-Parganas noted with regret what they thought to be “the indiscretion of the AIR’s shown by broadcasting the names of the arrested men in the evening news bulletin in Bengali and thereby giving an opportunity to their associates to escape”. (ABP, January 2, 1971, op.cit.)

Some Established Facts, Comments and Related Questions

1. The total number of assailants involved in the murder of Prof Gopal Sen was 5. According to the version of the darwan, all of them wearing trousers and shirts were running towards the railway track on the eastern side of the university compound (ABP, December 31 op.cit).
2. For the commission of the crime, they used iron rods and daggers.
3. The time of the commission of crime was 6.30 PM. The place of occurrence was only a few minutes’ walk from the Arabinda Bhawan towards Gate No.4 just after Central Library near a pond on the left. That place remains under darkness throughout the year from the evening.
4. As that walking path was the natural path to go from the main building to his quarter and the distance was very short, the assailants chose that particular dark spot for the commission of the crime. They must have made a thorough recce before, secretly kept the weapons somewhere inside the campus and the path to be taken for quick

escape. Quite likely, there must have been some internal accomplice. No doubt, the whole operation was pre-planned

5. The assailants did not use any facial cover or mask. The darwan, in his statement, did not mention any such thing.

Some Pertinent Questions and Comments

1. Rana Bose, a student of Jadavpur University, was arrested by the Calcutta Police from the house of one of his relatives on the charge of the murder of Prof Gopal Sen. The important question is: Was it at all possible for a student of JU wearing no face cover or mask to be directly involved in the commission of such a crime and escape without getting identified inside the campus?
2. It is pertinent to refer to the observation made by Prof Triguna Sen, the first Rector of JU: “My firm belief is that the assailants of Prof Sen were branded criminals and they had been engaged by some men to commit the murder” (‘Meeting mourns death of Prof Gopal Sen’, *Hindusthan Standard*, January 2, 1971). According to another report, “Dr Sen believed that those who committed his murder could never be students. The assailants must be outsiders and hired criminals, he said” (‘V.C’s Murder: student, driver held’, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, January 2, 1971).
3. The report of the arrest of Rana Bose and Prabhat Barik was broadcast by the All India Radio. This was described by the police as “indiscretion of the AIR” shown “by broadcasting the names of the two arrested men in the evening news bulletin in Bengali and thereby giving an opportunity to their associates

to escape” (*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, January 2, 1971, Reel 167, National Library). Such a statement is rather surprising. The names of the arrested persons were given to the AIR by the police themselves. Had they been so serious about keeping the names secret, they would have just mentioned the arrest of two persons without divulging their names. What the police force had done was done deliberately. It goes to the credit of the police force, until and unless the arrested men were not at all connected with the murder.

Police Raids and the arrest of Rana Bose

On 31 July the police raided the houses of two students of JU. One can get vivid accounts of the raids from the book “Footprints of Foot Soldiers—Experiences and Reflections of the Naxalite Movement in Eastern India 1960s and ‘70s” by Abhijit Das (pp.167-177). The first house to be raided was that of Abhijit Das at Fern Road. It was conducted by Debi Roy (DC, DD) and Inspector Ranajit Guha Neogy—the “two demonic names” who earned notoriety for their custodial torture and fake encounter killings. Abhijit had been working underground in the Malda district and was not at home. On the same night, another police force raided the house of Dr Amiyo Bose, the father of Rana Bose at Ballygunj Place. Rana Bose was not at home then. Later he was picked up from one of his relative’s house at Alipur that night. The usual interrogation and physical torture at Ballygunj Police Station, and later at Lalbazar, by the Detective Department was followed by further questioning and at Lord Sinha Road by the Special Branch of the Calcutta Police. We are reproducing part of the interrogation-torture session from Das’s book:

P.O.: Who murdered Gopal Sen?

Rana: I do not know.

P.O.: Aren't you ashamed that you murdered a teacher who is like your father?

Rana: I have not murdered him.

P.O.: Who else were with you?

Rana: When?

P.O.: Yesterday afternoon.

Rana: I was at my aunt's place, the place from where you have picked me.

P.O.: You are involved deeply with the activities of CPI (ML). What are the things that you have done?

Rana: Put up posters.

P.O.: In which areas?

Rana: Mainly in Tiljala.

P.O.: What about Jadavpur University?

Rana: I have not been much involved in JU students' front.

P.O.: Who are the leaders in JU?"

Rana: Earlier it was Abhijit Das. Now I do not know.

P.O.: But you are a student of JU...How come you don't know?

Rana: No I'm no more a student of JU. I quit studies more than a year ago.

P.O.: Where is Abhijit Das?

Rana: I don't know. The little I know is that he has quit CPI (ML)...

P.O.: You have been spotted in the main hostel of JU even a few days back.

Rana: Yes I went to meet my old friends.

[Rana was already in terrible pain because of the frequent beatings throughout this period...]

P.O.: You have been spotted frequently in the Tiljala slums.

Rana: I go to organise the tram workers...

P.O.: Are they not affiliated to CITU?

Rana: They were, but now they are getting converted to our politics.

P.O.: What is your politics? Annihilation?

Rana: No, People's Democratic Revolution.

P.O.: Who murdered Gopal Sen?

Rana: I do not know...

These repetitive questions were inevitably followed by rounds of torture. They hung Rana's body, and endlessly hit on the soles of his feet with an iron rod—called *kachua dholai*. Such ordeals went on for several days and ultimately he was sent to Presidency Jail. As he could not stand on his own feet, he had to be carried to the jail hospital by his comrades and admitted in Ward No, 5(Surgical Ward) where Dr. Gupta was in charge.

During those years of captivity in Presidency Jail Rana Bose took an active part in all the struggles waged by Naxalite prisoners. Swapan Guha@ Master—a resident of Belghoria—and a Naxalite prisoner undergoing treatment in the surgical ward later related the positive role played by him.

There were about 30 odd charges against him including the murder of Gopal Sen. He was formally released from prison since none of the charges could be proved. On the day of release after he came out of the main jail gate, he was again arrested under the Prevention of Violent Activity Act. Finally he was released in July 1971 probably due the intervention of Bhupesh Gupta, an MP of the CPI, who was familiar with Rana's parents and was also very close to Indira Gandhi. Rana was released on a condition; he would not be permitted to reside in West Bengal for one year.

Rana Bose was in need of an identity and a shelter away from home. He got it at Jamshedpur in the house of a relative. A year later he came back to Calcutta and sought to relocate himself and reorganise the tram workers' cell.

But he was told by the workers that although they thought well of him, they did not want to get into trouble again. Rana then wanted to get readmission into JU. However, the Controller of Examinations refused to allow him readmission. One can quite understand that his application for readmission must have created a sensation in the Arabinda Bhawan. How could a person, even though released from charges of the murder of the Vice-Chancellor, be re-admitted as a student? He then tried to get admission in other Indian universities such as IIT, Delhi and IIT, Mumbai; for that he needed a transcript from JU. But P C V Mullick, the Controller refused to give it. (Based on my telephonic conversation with him dated May 4, 2023).

His sister had been living in the USA. She arranged for his admission there in St. Louis University. His belief in revolution remained unaltered. Along with Hari Prasad Sharma and others, he was involved in the formation of Indian People's Association (IPANA). Later he settled down in Montreal, Canada.

Popular beliefs about the connection of Rana Bose with the Murder of Gopal Chandra Sen: How far are those tenable?

A student of Chemical Engineering Department, Rana Bose got involved in Naxalbari politics. His father Dr Amiyo Bose was then one of the leading cardiologists of the country. A former member of the Jugantar Samiti, he was closely associated with Bhupesh Gupta, Jyoti Bose and others. Rana's mother, Chameli Bose was, as he told me, the first woman in the world to have got a BSc in Mathematics from the University College, London—a degree that was equivalent to MSc in Statistics. She did her research under Professors RAV Fisher and RW

Deming. After the completion of research, she joined the Presidency College Baker Laboratory as a teacher and Dr Amiyo Bose joined as a teacher in the Calcutta Medical College.

In those tumultuous days, many young men and women from well-placed educated families joined revolutionary politics. Rana Bose involved himself in the work among the tram workers in the Tiljala slum area.

After the murder of Prof Gopal Sen on December 30, 1970, the Calcutta police first raided the house of Abhijit Das. He was not in his house. Then they went to Rana Bose's place and arrested him from one of his relative's place. Had they been able to nab Abhijit, he would undoubtedly have also been charged with the murder of the Vice-Chancellor. After Bose's arrest, the belief gained ground that he must have been involved in the murder. Subsequent developments—his release due apparently to his family's high social position and high-level connections, departure for abroad for the completion of study and subsequent permanent settlement abroad—strengthened this belief.

The present writer begs to differ from such a view as it is factually, circumstantially and legally untenable. Let us explain the basis of my disagreement.

Firstly, at the initial part of our discussion we have explained that it was impossible for a student of JU to enter the campus with iron rods and daggers without drawing attention of anyone, kill the teacher and escape from the campus. None of the five assailants had his face covered.

Secondly, a number of persons including Dr Triguna Sen asserted that this was the handiwork of professional killers; it could never be work of any student. The selection of the head and the abdomen and injury marks imprinted on those

parts bore the mark not of amateurs, but of professional hands.

Thirdly, the fact is that at one point of time, Rana Bose sought re-admission at Jadavpur University. Had the charge of murder of the Vice-Chancellor against Rana Bose been true, would he by any stretch of imagination be in a position to seek admission in the same institution? He can apply only when he is innocent.

Fourthly, Prof Gopal Sen was a very popular teacher who endeared himself to the students. He had enmity with none. As the head of the institution he was duty-bound to hold examinations on time. One cannot allow copying during normal times. However, during those times when classes were frequently suspended, campus was kept closed sine die, campus hostels were kept closed and examinations were deferred or suspended affecting the career of the students, the Vice-Chancellor could hardly be blamed for allowing license during examinations. Is it possible for a student to kill the VC as a natural reaction?

Fifthly, the belief that has been in circulation among a section of the Jadavpurians is that Rana's family background and high-level connections played a role in his early release from prison. Such a view is undesirable. Rana Bose can hardly be blamed for his social position. On the contrary, he, like many others of the younger generation, left that path of self-promotion and took to the revolutionary path. His social position did not prevent the custodial torture he had undergone. While in prison, he took a positive stand befitting a revolutionary, stood by the side of his comrades-in-arms and waged struggles against injustice and oppression.

Sixthly, the most important fact—an irrefutable proof—of Rana Bose's non-involvement in the crime

is that he was out of Calcutta at the time of its occurrence. During my recent telephonic conversation with him held on May 4, 2023, he told me: "In late December 1970, I was in Delhi along with my father, who went there to attend a conference at St. Stephens College. On that fateful day(30 December 1970) we were returning from Delhi by train. I had been suffering from asthma. Father told me to meet Dr Bhar and get a chest-x-ray done in his chamber. 'Come to me with the x-ray report. Do not stay here; stay with your aunt'".

Seventhly, Arun Mukherjee, the Special Branch officer who interrogated Rana Bose, disclosed the reasons of his arrest. Let me quote Rana Bose: "Arun Mukherjee told me, 'Prime Minister Indira Gandhi has given me 24 hours' time to arrest someone and make an announcement'. He smiled at me and remarked: 'The reason for attaching you to this case is that you are the safest'".

West Bengal was then under President's rule. The occurrence of such a crime had put the credibility of the central government in question. Some immediate arrests were to be made to undo the damage done. It was this compulsion that explains this arrest of Rana Bose. However, all said, the present writer could not understand why Rana Bose was treated as the 'safest'.

Rana Bose wanted to study at home; he did not wish to go abroad. It was the adverse situation that forced him to leave. He was never connected with the murder of Gopal Chandra Sen. He told me over phone: "During that period Prof Gopal Sen was in favour of holding examinations by fair means or foul. I was not connected with the event of his murder, except that I got an intuition that something like that was going to happen". Those among

retired teachers and ex-students of JU who still hold this belief are hereby requested to rethink the whole affair deeply in a new light.

Then why was the VC murdered and by whom?

Frontier, the leftist weekly edited by Samar Sen, carried an editorial captioned 'Murder' :

"A brilliant economist teaching at a university has been warned thrice, in posters, that he would be killed. Though a bit uneasy, he laughed it off—until Wednesday, Dec 30, when the news broke of the brutal murder of the Vice Chancellor of Jadavpur University. The professor, a leftist far from unsympathetic to the Naxalites, does not quite believe that they can be after him. But there is no knowing who is doing what and to whom and why. The general tendency, fed by newspaper reporting, is to associate the CPI (ML) with almost every such attack....

"...The propaganda organ of the party, before it went underground, had created a climate in which almost anything can be said of the CPI (ML). It seldom disclaimed the things ascribed to the party...

"One can understand the impatience and anger of young men who know they can be attacked and betrayed any day by the crusading Marxists to the police, arrested, tortured or shot dead. The times and the partisans are murderous, but in the mutual murder game, what is being forgotten is the opinion of the uncommitted, the battle for the minds of men. There is good deal of revulsion at what is happening. The revulsion is turning into apathy. The apathy and the hideous interparty vendettas are responsible for the way the police and other people are getting

away with everything. The CPI (ML), deprived of regular publications, cannot fight all the way the propaganda of much bigger and more organised parties. However, whatever the hurdles, the CPI(ML) leaders and cadres owe it to themselves, their ideology, their cause to do everything possible to preserve their image... With so many agent-provocateurs around, decentralization—a necessity at times—can lead to dangerous developments if the strictest ideological discipline is not maintained" (Vol 3, No 40, January 9, 1971).

The editorial shows quite clearly and sharply how complicated the situation was during those troubled times. The responsibility for any murder—except those perpetrated by the police—fell on the Naxalites even if they were not at all connected with it. And hardly did they disclaim responsibility for it. The lumpen elements associated with the opposition parties took advantage of it. Except on one or two occasions did the CPI(ML) leadership condemn such indiscriminate killings. One can mention one or two such instances. An owner of an oil-mill was annihilated at Belgachhia. Charu Mazumdar criticised it stating that during the stage of New Democratic Revolution, oil-mill owners were not our class enemies. The other such case was the annihilation of Sucharukanti Ghosh associated with the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. On hearing the news, Saroj Datta was said to have remarked: "How could they kill a person like Sucharukanti who was close to us. He was not our enemy". During those times of utmost political uncertainty accompanied by total decentralisation of urban guerrilla activity, the responsibility of the CPI(ML) leadership was to exercise control over urban actions. Only

one single statement from the top leadership was needed to get the desired result and that from none other than Charu Mazumdar. However, no such statement was issued.

The CPI(M) Bengali mouthpiece, *Ganashakti Sandhya Dainik* dated January 1, 1971, in its editorial remarked: "According to police sources, 'the assailants appear to be Naxalites'. Do the police not know who the assailants are? ...What about the promise of investigation into it as declared by the Prime Minister? Whatever the case, the police can never disown responsibility. The possibility of involvement of foreign agencies in it cannot be ruled out...One must find out who stood behind this murder..." It is interesting that the CPI(M) had not put the blame on the Naxalites with whom they are engaged in regular bloody conflicts. Instead, they have highlighted the possible role of foreign agencies in it.

In the period following the murder, at least two statements came out from the CPI(ML)—one leaflet probably distributed by the JU's party unit, and the other by the CPI(ML) WB State Committee as published in *Deshabrati*, their party organ. It is notable that the content of the one is just the opposite of that of the other.

The present writer could know recently about the distribution of a leaflet from the Facebook wall of Mini Ghosh, then a student of the Comparative Literature Department. She noted in her post: "...next day morning I got the news of the death of the Vice Chancellor of the university at the hands of assailants—after seven days, we could get a leaflet in our desk in which the accused political party disclaimed responsibility for the commission of the crime..." Mini Ghosh did not elaborate in her post whether it was circulated on behalf of any specific party committee or not. However,

since it was circulated inside the campus, it was probably issued on behalf of the JU unit.

The second document was *Deshabrati*, the organ of the WB State Committee of the CPI(ML). The report bore the caption 'Class struggle surges ahead in the urban areas'. We are reproducing the relevant portion of it: "...as the youth and students have been directing their attacks on the colonial educational institutions and the idols of stooges of imperialism, guerrilla squads of the workers have been carrying on annihilations of IB officers, police officers, police constables, Border Security Force officers, police informers in the guise of common people, members of anti-Naxal squads... besides, they are annihilating government bureaucrats actively assisting the fascist government... annihilated too was Gopal Chandra Sen, Vice-Chancellor of Jadavpur University, who created an armed fascist band with CPM cadres inside the campus by removing the CRP from the campus and at the same time had been strengthening this bastion of espionage on behalf of US imperialism..." (*Deshabrati*, 15 February 1971. *Deshabrati Sankalan 8 Ebong Jalark*, Year 8, Nos. 3, 4, January-June 2004).

In response to the two charges, we would like to make some observations. The mobilisation of CPM student-cadres including outsiders to ensure the smooth holding of examinations in September 1970 was criticised by students and teachers alike. That part has been dealt with earlier. Regarding US connections, there were departments in three faculties who had academic connections with US universities. From the US side it was part of their policy of cultural penetration into other countries. But to maintain that it was aimed at converting Jadavpur University into a

base for US espionage is too far-fetched. Besides these, Prof Gopal Sen was very popular among all sections of the students and staff.

It is difficult to judge the veracity of the CPI(ML) statement. However, as it came out in the WB State Committee organ of the party, it implies that they had formally accepted responsibility for the murder. Such a statement is at variance with the content of the leaflet that Mini Ghosh mentioned.

There are some other points that need consideration. While going through the report, one gets the impression that the middle-class youth and students were involved in acts of iconoclasm and attacks on bourgeois educational system while working class squads were engaged in the annihilation of state forces, stooges and government officials. And the murder in question was done by a working class squad. That naturally implies that no student of JU was involved in the murder of Prof Gopal Sen. The leaflet that Mini Ghosh has mentioned—which most probably was circulated by the JU party unit—also gave credence to that statement. When Meena Sengupta, the then librarian of the Department of International Relations asked Dilip Banerjee, an Engineering Faculty Naxalite student about it, Dilip replied that they were not involved in it. Meenadi asked him: "But everybody inside the campus is blaming your party; why not make an investigation?" Dilip replied: "Why should we? It has to be done by the university". (Interview with Meena Sengupta dated March 5, 2023 taken at her residence)

It is pertinent to point out also that in all cases of Naxalite political actions, slogans were raised justifying the actions. In the present case, it was done silently without raising any slogans.

It will not be irrelevant to make certain observations on the role of working class squads at this stage.

First, had the question been a conflict between the students and the Vice-Chancellor, then why at all should there be an intervention by the workers? Why should it be done by a working class squad?

Second, there had been, within the CPI(ML) then, a clear dislike for trade union activity. Hence the number of working class participation was less. Due to erroneous notion about working class movement, the CPI(ML) leadership could not develop any major working class movement. However, in the Behala Hyde Road working class belt and the Belgachhia Milk Dairy, the working class could maintain the continuity of working class movement spontaneously. Despite this weakness, in the party organs news highlighting working class participation in political actions—that had nothing to do with concrete reality—was widely published. In many cases, the news was published without proper verification. Similarly, in many cases regarding the annihilation of jotedars in the countryside, the participation of poor and landless peasant squads was reported in the party journal while, in reality, those actions were done by petty bourgeois youth squads.

Let us turn to another relevant factor. We do know whether any statement was issued by the Dhakuria-Jadavpur-Haltu local committee of the CPI(ML) after the incident. Ashu Mazumdar, a former student of the International Relations Department of JU was in charge of the area. He was alive at that time. One of the party members of that area was Sankar Ray Choudhury whom the present writer interviewed in 1990 while working on the Naxalbari movement. Many events were reported; however, I did

not hear anything about the death of the VC. It appears that the said committee did not have anything to do with the murder (See: Amit Bhattacharyya, *Spring Thunder and Kolkata An Epic Story of Courage and Sacrifice 1965-72*, Setu, Kolkata, 2018, pp.122-140.). The most important question is: Could any outside party unit carry out such an operation inside the university campus without the knowledge of the local party committee?

But the reality is that this news came out in *Deshabrati*. Could it imply that the report was published without verifying whether that action was a CPI(ML) action or not. Quite correctly did *Frontier* hold that the CPI(ML) “seldom disclaimed the things ascribed to the party”. That opens up another possibility. Does it mean that it was handiwork of agent-provocateurs around who

consciously sought to malign Naxalbari politics. *Frontier* was quite aware of this possibility : “With so many agent-provocateurs around, decentralization of party activities—a necessity at times—can lead to dangerous developments if the Strictest ideological discipline is not maintained”(op.cit).

Rana Bose, falsely implicated in that case, was released from prison. No news of Probodh Barik is available to us. The case was probably withdrawn after some time. It could not be done without the approval of the state. Why did the government withdraw this case? Does it indicate any fresh possibility?

On May 13, the present writer got the news of the demise of Rana Bose in Montreal. He died of Multiple Myeloma cancer after prolonged illness. Right from the day of his arrest till my last telephonic conver-

sation with him on May 4, 2023, he had all along denied his involvement in the murder of Prof Gopal Chandra Sen. Incidentally, that interview that I could have with him was his last interview. In the eyes of the law, that constituted his “Dying Declaration”, and this declaration is true in the eyes of the law. The false stigma that he bore for so many decades would, hopefully, now be removed. Rana Bose can now rest in peace. Let me pay my homage to the departed soul. □□□

[Acknowledgement: Rana Bose, who replied to my queries from his death bed in Montreal; Mini Ghosh, former student of Comparative Literature Department, JU for her Facebook post; Pranab Banerjee, Rtd. Professor, Electrical Telecommunication Department; Swapan Dasadikari for the *Ebong Jalark* volumes; Partha Sarathi Pathhak who helped enrich my understanding of that tumultuous period.]

[Amit Bhattacharyya (Retired Professor, Department of History, Jadavpur University)]

**JUST
PUBLISHED**

WITHOUT PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Thinking Rationally

By Ashok Nag

A Frontier Publication

Price: Rs 300

This book of essays is a collection of articles that the author had written for his blog. The thread that binds these disparate articles written over a decade can be found in the book's title. Rationality is a big claim. But the author has tried his best to remain unbiased, subject to the boundaries defined by his own intellectual capability and knowledge.

The first article was written in the centenary year of Bolshevik revolution. The article digs into the Marxist concepts of “class” and “class struggle” which formed the ideological underpinning of that revolution. The author argues that even Marx himself could not explain the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte in terms of his own concept of “class struggle”.

In a one-page article written in the wake of so-called “Arab Spring” uprising in the Arab world, the author rightly identified that movement as a reflection of crumbling of the world order with USA as its hegemonic power.

The articles on technology has one common underlying theme- innovations driven by research can only bring about sustained economic growth and transition from a state of poverty to prosperity for any nation. At the same time, the author had warned in 2017 itself that Bitcoin is nothing but an abuse of technology, a Ponzi game to the boot.

On policy issues, the article on the recent changes in Farm laws shows that any distortion in Indian agricultural market cannot be remedied by a mechanical application of market fundamentalism.

Finally, two poems at the end are pure labour of love.

For copies contact Frontier [Sharmistha Dutta/8240016324 or 033-2530-0065]

PUTIN'S OBSESSION AND ZELENSKY'S DILEMMA

The Future of the War in Ukraine

Sumanta Banerjee

A YEAR BEFORE YEVGENY Prigozhin led his Wagner group of mercenaries in a mutiny against his patron President Putin in June this year, a book came out in London revealing the inner secrets of Putin's establishment that indicated that a mutiny was waiting to happen. Although abortive, and settled through a compromise for the present, the mutiny is a sign of the conflicts embedded in the various levels of the Russian administration and society that will continue to manifest in other forms to plague the Putin regime.

The book is entitled: **OPPOSITION TO THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE: HOW MUCH OF A THREAT IS IT TO PUTIN'S REGIME?** written by two researchers Nicholas Chkhaidze and Taros Kuzio and published in 2022 by Henry Jackson Society, London.

It offers a well-documented account of some important developments within Russia prior to Putin's invasion of Ukraine in February 2020 (described euphemistically as 'special military operation' by Putin), as well as the current trends following the invasion, which indicate growing opposition among different classes of Russians against the war.

Till now, reportages and analytical articles have mainly laid stress on the external threat faced by Russia (the increasing expansion of NATO's control over the East European states neighbouring Russia), and the danger faced by the Russian-speaking people inside Ukraine from neo-Nazi groups supported by NATO. While NATO's nefarious plan to encroach on Russia's borders and interfere in Ukraine's domestic politics, needs to

be condemned, one must also remember that this was not the sole factor that compelled Putin to send his troops to Ukraine. What is little known is that there were several internal factors too that led to the war. This book throws light on the domestic backdrop to the war in Ukraine, its roots having been laid within the political soil of Russia.

In a chapter entitled 'How Russia Became a Fascist State,' the authors trace the historical source of the present war to post-Soviet Russia's transition from an authoritarian regime run by a cabal to a one-man dictatorship. The transition was brought about and institutionalised by Putin, who as the President in 2020 made changes in the Constitution. These changes will allow him to remain in power till 2036, thus de facto making him president for life. They hark back to the Stalinist era when the cult of personality and hero-worship of Stalin were the rules. The chapter gives detailed reports of how over the last decade an 'Ukraineanphobia' was built up through Putin's speeches and the official-controlled Russian media that de-humanised Ukrainians as neo-Nazi enemies of Russia. The rhetoric often echoed the past Tzarist claims over Ukraine as a part of the Great Russian Empire. The authors suggest that Putin's annexation of Crimea and invasion of Ukraine are a manifestation of his ambition to emerge as a champion of Russian nationalism to restore that empire.

After explaining these current internal impulses—both personal and nationalist—that are driving Putin to continue the war, the authors delve

into the other side of the picture in Russia. Behind the façade of national unity put up by Putin, there are other forces that are lurking to threaten his rule. Three important chapters—'How Putin's Obsession With Ukraine Threatens His Regime'; 'Disgruntled State Officials'; and 'Is a Coup Attempt in the Kremlin likely?'—substantiate the authors' conclusions with documentary evidence of the dissent growing among not only the common Russians (who are being forcibly recruited to fight the war in Ukraine), but also within the Russian elite consisting of bureaucrats and military personnel.

The chapter on 'Disgruntled State Officials' comes up with names of important bureaucrats and diplomats, who were once Putin's close allies and advisors, but who are now publicly condemning his Ukraine misadventure—Anatoly Chubais (former special envoy to international organisations), Arkady Dvorkovich (former deputy prime minister) and Vladislav Surkov (once advisor to Putin on policies relating to Ukraine). Many others have been either forced to resign or shunted out by Putin.

The other disgruntled elements are the 'Siloviki'—members of intelligence agencies like FSB (successor of the Soviet KGB), GRU (the Russian military intelligence) and the military national guard Rosgvardia. Most of them are descendants of the senior ranks of the former KGB and enjoy privileges. The constraints of the Ukraine war and the Western sanctions are compelling Putin to cut down on such privileges. Thus their comfortable and luxurious life style is being threatened.

But apart from the disgruntlement among these upper sections of Russian society, it is the common Russians who are likely to be in-

creasingly resentful of Putin's war. Comparing the domestic repercussions of Soviet misadventure in Afghanistan in the past, with the discomfiture of the Russian people with their President's present war in Ukraine, the authors write: "In the 1980s the USSR could not hide the high level of casualties in Afghanistan from the Soviet people....Putin's regime will also be unable to hide the ramifications of his invasion of Ukraine from the Russian people, which will have major consequences for the stability of Putin's regime and his ability to hold on to power."

After accumulating all these factual information about the increasing opposition to Putin from the upper echelons of the Establishment as well as disenchantment with him among civil society within Russia which pose a threat to Putin, the authors enter into the next zone with the chapter: 'Is a Coup Attempt in the Kremlin Likely?'

They speculate that it is the powerful members of the Russian military apparatus (e.g. FSB, GRU and 'Siloviki') who have suffered most due to Putin's misadventure, who may plot a coup to dislodge Putin.

The speculation in the above-mentioned book made a year ago appears to come true today as the war in Ukraine enters one-and-a-half year of Putin's 'special military operation.' The Russian army is facing increasing military disasters. High level of casualties and huge losses of military equipment are having a detrimental impact on Russian morale. Till now, at least twelve high ranking generals are reported to have been killed. Discontent among the top military brass came out in the open, after General Ivan Popov, a commander who was in charge of military operations in the crucial Zaporizhzhia region (which shelters a nuclear plant) in Ukraine, accused his government's Defence

Ministry of betraying his troops by not providing sufficient support. Putin retaliated by dismissing him in July. Ivan Popov has now gone public with a statement exposing the military mismanagement in conducting the war. (Re: CNN, July 13). Is it not surprising that Popov's dismissal comes less than three weeks after the mutiny mounted by the Wagner mercenary chief Yevgeny Prigozhin—who made the same allegations against Putin's Defence Ministry, accusing it of betraying his soldiers by denying military aid?

Soon after, on July 21, the Russian police raided the house of Igor Girkin, a former intelligence officer who helped Putin during his operations in annexing Crimea in 2014. But recently, Girkin had fallen foul of Putin, because he made personal attacks on him accusing him of cowardice and failing to mount enough offensive to win the war in Ukraine. The police accused him of "engaging in extremist activities." (Re: *New York Times*).

What are Putin's problems? Has he run out of sophisticated weapons that can contest with the latest state-of-the-art armaments that are being poured into Ukraine by NATO? Is the Russian armoury stacked with Soviet-era weaponry, which are of little use in today's warfare? His opponents behind the closed walls of Kremlin are blaming him for his incompetence and are baying for his blood as evident from the recent developments described above.

Such rivalries leading to palace coups are not unknown in the history of Russia, whether under the Tzars, or the Soviet regime, or the post-Soviet era. Let us recall a few such major coups that took place there during the last several decades. In March 1953, after Stalin's death, a power struggle broke out in Kremlin among the old guards. Lavrentiy Beria, who was the secret

police chief under Stalin's rule, took over as a minister in charge of internal affairs. Soon after however he was ousted by a cabal consisting of Molotov, Malenkov and Khrushchev who took over Kremlin. They arrested Beria and executed him in December 1953. But soon again the trio split. The more enterprising and younger Khrushchev forced the two veterans Molotov and Malenkov out of the race, and occupied the throne in Kremlin. In an ironical twist, some ten years later, in another palace coup, in October 1964 Khrushchev was ousted by his erstwhile protégé Leonid Brezhnev. The decades that followed saw one president succeeding another—Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin, all through palace coups.

It is important to note that the Communist regime in Russia, as well as the post-Soviet rulers, never institutionalised electoral contests among different political parties to test popular opinion and allow the election of rulers. Instead, they encouraged individual leaders of their own ruling party to build up their respective constituencies and acquire power by crushing opponents—whether from the political stream or civil society. In such a system of authoritarian politics, rivalries are bound to emerge among leaders of the ruling party. The ruler is more likely to fall to challenges from inside his palace gates, than to popular upheavals outside. Putin is facing these challenges from within the palace of Kremlin.

But in the meantime, the world is facing a humanitarian crisis. Apart from the daily loss of lives and displacement of people which are confined to the war-torn areas, other parts of the world are threatened by the economic fall-out of the war—destabilisation in trade relations, stoppage of grain exports from Ukraine, among other commercial disruptions.

The main question is—how long can Putin afford to continue the war, in the face of both growing internal discontent within Russia and mounting external military threat from NATO, as well as condemnation by international human rights bodies? His vengeful scorched earth policy of bombing Ukraine resulting in deaths of innocent citizens has created a humanitarian crisis. It has attracted denunciation by the International Criminal Court (ICC) which, on March 17, 2023 issued arrest warrants against him accusing him of war crimes over abduction of children from Ukraine. A panicky Putin fled from attending the BRICS summit in Johannesburg in July, since the host country South Africa being a signatory to the Rome Statute that established the ICC would have been obliged to arrest him once he landed there.

Quite predictably, the US and its NATO allies are exploiting this global body's indictment of Putin as a sought after criminal who is at large and needs to be apprehended for war crimes. Curiously enough, these same US and NATO forces committed similar war crimes for decades in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and other places, bombing civilian inhabitants—and yet they were allowed to get away by the International Criminal Court.

But then, as the old saying goes: "Two wrongs don't make a right". Just because NATO's crimes went unpunished, should one use the same precedent to excuse Putin's crimes?

For Frontier Contact
Central News Agency
23/90, CONNAUGHT CIRCUS
NEW DELHI 110001

Putin's opponent, President Zelensky of Ukraine should also equally share some blame for continuing the war that has wreaked havoc upon the common people of both his homeland, and the neighbouring areas of Russia—who are being bombarded daily by the two warring contestants, Russia determined to take over Ukraine on the one hand and NATO equally determined to pour arms to defend Zelensky against the take-over.

But that apart, coming to the latest NATO summit that was held at Vilnius in Lithuania on June 11-12, reports suggest that the members of this military alliance are divided over the question of how long can they afford and continue to offer military aid to Ukraine. Besides, the US decision to send cluster bombs to bolster Ukraine's anti-Russian offensive, has alienated its European allies who are signatories to an agreement that bans cluster bombs.

Conflicts have also come up between Zelensky and the US and European powers which have been backing him. Zelensky's mounting demand for more weaponry and baby cry asking for entry into NATO, have become an irritant for these European states, who are no longer sure how long the dragging war in Ukraine will continue. It is draining their internal resources—in terms of military and financial aid that they are pouring in to sustain the war. At the NATO summit in Lithuania, an exasperated UK minister Ben Wallace rebuked Zelensky for demanding more arms, saying: "We are not Amazon"—referring to the global agency which delivers commodities at a throw away price on orders from consumers.

Back home Zelensky is facing dissent from within his own establishment. On July 21, his minister for culture resigned over a contro-

versy about funding his projects. The same day, Zelensky dismissed the Ukrainian ambassador to UK, Vadym Prystaiko, for publicly criticising him.

Thus caught between Putin's egoist goal of winning the war in Ukraine on the one hand, and the US-led NATO's determination to defeat Putin on the other, the world public cannot hope for an immediate solution to this conflict between two European powers which are fighting a proxy war over Ukraine.

But even as people continue to politically debate at global flora and international media over the query: 'Who first threw the stone—Putin or Zelensky?', from a humanitarian view the world has to ensure the protection of the victims of this war—the common Ukrainians who are being pulverised by Putin's air-planes, and on the other side of the border their civilian counterparts—the common Russian citizens who are being indiscriminately targeted by Zelensky's drones that are supplied by NATO. One cannot ignore the basic issue—the devastation of lives of innocent non-combatant Ukrainians and Russians and their displacement caused by this continuing war.

Ever since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, several proposals had been floated from different quarters for a negotiated settlement—without showing any light at the end of the twisting tunnel. There seem to be two options only. It has to be either a return to the status quo ante (withdrawal of the Russian forces to the pre-war position thus allowing Ukraine to retain its old territory), or an acceptance of the present status quo (allowing the Russian forces to retain the areas that they now occupy, and the Ukraine forces to stick to the areas that they govern and have recovered from Russian occupation). □□□

TALE OF A GURU

Hindutva Sleeping Cell in Congress

Shamsul Islam

THE 2023 KARNATAKA Assembly elections was a milestone in the fight for saving Indian democracy from the Hindutva onslaught. Congress defeated RSS-BJP convincingly. Though it was a State election but the results had national ramifications. Karnataka had become the newest Hindutva laboratory; the RSS-BJP campaigners used every dirty trick in the Hindutva armoury of communal polarisation to put a stamp of approval to the rule of Basavaraj Bommai. Under him Karnataka had turned into a land out of bound for Muslims, their beliefs and customs; lynching becoming a new normal. What was at stake for PM Modi in this election can be known by the fact that he asked for votes in the name of Bajrang Bali (Hanuman).

Congress could win because it boldly challenged the Hindutva bigotry during election promising that it would ban organisations like Bajrang Dal (RSS storm-troopers) and discard anti-minority laws passed by the Bommai government including pro-Hindutva changes in the school text books. Congress victory was ensured due to unwavering stand against Hindutva communal polarising campaign by the Congress top campaigners, including Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi, Siddarmaiah and DK Shivakumar.

Sadly, UT Khader Fareed, Speaker of Karnataka Assembly, who won on Congress ticket, is showing no inclination to defend this gain, on the contrary using his office to legitimise the Hindutva ideology. He has invited a die-hard Hindutva Guru, Art of Living's founder Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, as a

prominent resource person to train the first time MLAs, numbering 70, in meditation and yoga therapy apart from classes on the technicalities of law making.

Who advised him to invite this Hindutva Baba who is not content with having one SRI with his name but two? Egoism at galore! It is shocking that a senior Congress leader from Karnataka is not familiar with anti-national and anti-humanity background of this Baba. He has been a prominent speaker at almost all RSS events. He is a die-hard believer in Casteism. If Speaker had even asked a clerk in his office to search the Hindutva credentials of double SRI, the former would have been provided with the following troubling facts.

Double SRI is an old patron of Hindutva organisations like Hindu Janajagruti Samiti (HJS), an affiliate of Sanatan Sanstha. These organisations are being investigated for assassinations of MM Kalburgi (a renowned thinker and critic of Brahmanism, assassinated on August 30, 2017), Gauri Lankesh (a renowned Lingayat author, journalist and activist, assassinated on September 5, 2017), Govind Pansare (a noted Communist leader, historian, assassinated on February 20, 2015) and Narender Dabholkar (Great Rationalist and thinker, assassinated on August 20, 2013). The first two belonged to Speaker's own State.

How close and old is the relationship of this double SRI with these organisations which are being investigated for Hindutva terrorism can be known by the following statement of Mumbai region Convener of HJS Shivaji Varkar and Ramesh

Shinde, spokesperson of HJS for Maharashtra stated after meeting double Sri on the 20th November (2006) in Mumbai:

"The founder of the 'Art of Living' Pujya Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (Swamiji) has given his blessings to the activities of the Hindu Janajagruti Samiti (HJS)... He conveyed His blessings. Swamiji further said that He knew about the HJS' activities and appreciated the same. He also said that, the HJS should continue to create awareness among the masses...Shri. Shinde also informed Swamiji about the campaigns undertaken by the HJS against the 'Anti-Superstition Act' and the 'Temple Takeover Act' with a view to make the society aware of anti-Hindu activities being undertaken by the Maharashtra Government. On this occasion, Swamiji was also shown sattvik pictures of deities drawn by seekers of the Sanatan Sanstha."

It is to be noted that apart from, as per police investigations, being involved in assassinations of 'anti-Hindu' intellectuals HJS and Sanatan Sanstha have been involved in aggressive campaigns for converting democratic-secular India into Hindu rashtra. The theme of the yearly conferences is fixed; 'All India Hindu Convention for Establishment of Hindu Nation. In 2013, the 2nd such conference began with a felicitation message from Modi as CM of Gujarat. Double Sri could not come to grace the conference but bestowed his blessings by offering a yellow shawl to Shivaji Varkar to be presented in the said conference.

It was at this conference that a senior RSS cadre, K V Sitaramiah, in his address declared that Gandhi was 'terrible, wicked and most sinful'. Rejoicing the killing of M K Gandhi, he went on to declare:

"As Bhagwan Shri Krishna said in

the Gita, Paritranaaya Sadhunam Vinashaya Cha Dushkritam/ Dharamasansthapnaya Sambhavamami Yuge-Yuge (For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness, I am born in every age) On 30th January 1948 evening, Shriram came in the form of Nathuram Godse and ended the life of Gandhi”.

Double Sri's modus operandi, operations, gimmicks and close connections with RSS have been recorded by a renowned South Asia expert and journalist, Edward Luce, in his amazing book, *In Spite of the Gods: The Strange Rise of Modern India*, Doubleday, New York, 2007.

Narrating details of a meeting with him at his palatial ashram at Bengaluru Luce stated:

“I had come to visit Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (not to be confused with Ravi Shankar, the classical sitar player), who is perhaps the most prominent of a new breed of highly successful Hindu evangelists, at his Art of Living Foundation near Bangalore in south India. It was evening and hundreds of devotees had already congregated for evening prayers. From close up, the meditation hall was even more striking. Rising to five stories, it had been built entirely from marble. The hall was shaped like a lotus. There were 1,008 marble petals covering the exterior of the building symbolising the diversity of human consciousness. It was only a few years old. The funding for this extravagant construction had come from corporate donations—much of it from the software companies in nearby Bangalore—and revenues the foundation earns from its hugely popular course in breathing techniques and meditation. ‘Come inside,’ said the polite young lady assigned to show me around. ‘You are just in time to

watch the guruji take his evening questions’.”

“The interior was even more striking, fashioned like a Roman amphitheatre. We sat on polished white marble steps looking down at the stage in the centre. I felt like I had stepped inside a large wedding cake... Alone on the stage, on what looked to be a large throne, sat a man in flowing white robes with an equally flowing white robes with an equally flowing beard and silky locks of hair falling luxuriantly around his shoulders. It looked as if Jesus were shooting a shampoo advertisement. This was Sri Sri Ravi Shankar”.

Referring to Question-Answer session Luce wrote:

“There was some chanting and clashing of cymbals. Then the prayers ended and a hush descended over the hall. It was time for guruji to take questions. I, expecting people to ask about higher consciousness or metaphysics. But the questions consisted mostly of mundane queries about how to deal with recalcitrant teenagers, whether staying late in the office was a good thing, and how to choose a marriage partner. The guruji spoke in a quiet but sonorous voice. But his answers were more like those of an advice columnist than a prophet... Someone asked about whether it was always wrong to pay bribes. ‘You shouldn’t be too idealistic all the time’, said the guruji. ‘Sometimes you have to make little, little compromises’. Again the audience erupted in laughter. I was beginning to wonder about the Art of Living’s breathing techniques”.

According to Luce double SRI was a fervent supporter of building of a Ram Temple after demolishing Babri Mosque at Ayodhya:

“What is less widely known is the

guruji's close attachment to the RSS. He has shared platforms with VHP leaders at public meetings. I asked him whether the Ram Temple should be built in Ayodhya. ‘Suppose,’ he said, ‘that it was the birthplace of Jesus or Mohammed. What would you have done? Would you have tolerated another structure on that site? Let us build a temple to Ram and let the Muslims make this gesture as an act of goodwill and then the temple will also belong to Allah and to all Muslims.’ To Allah? I asked. ‘Yes, as you must have seen, we accept all paths to God. Sometimes we wish other religions would do the same.’ The guruji's words reminded me of Advani's desire to see more ‘Hindu Muslims and more ‘Hindu Christians’.”

Luce underlining the deep partnership between double SRI and RSS shared an anecdote:

“A few weeks later received a telephone call from Ram Madhav, the national spokesman of the RSS. ‘I am calling about Sri Sri Ravi Shankar,’ said Madhav. ‘I was talking to him the other day and he said he was disappointed with your article in the Financial Times. You only quoted his views on politics and the Shankaracharya. He said he was hoping you would quote his views on tolerance and spiritualism.’ It is true my article had lacked space to quote the guruji's opinions on other matters. But I was surprised the guruji should have chosen the RSS—of all organisations—to convey his complaint.”

It is high time Congress leaders like Karnataka Speaker Khader Fareed who are part of Hindutva sleeping cells in Congress are divested of all responsibilities. The democratic-secular India is indebted to Karnataka for being a barricade against the free run of the Hindutva bandwagon, let no Fifth Columnist be allowed to demolish it. □□□

VANISHING JOBS

Of Lay-offs and Retrenchment

Nityananda Ghosh

POST COVID INDUSTRIAL scenario as well as social and economic milieu of workers, both in organised and unorganised sectors are deplorable. Mass lay-offs have finished the hope of workers to dream for a better future. And digital labour is the worst affected. Globally Tech Companies have been downsizing their labour force through massive lay-off for quite some time. India is not immune to this lay-off phenomenon. Meta, Twitter, Microsoft, Alphabet—all the giants resorted to mass lay-off in 2022. In truth about 1,388 tech companies, both big and small, laid off a total of 233,483 employees mostly in 2022. As many as 1200 Twitter employees were forced to resign. Elon Musk, the new owner of Twitter symbolises the 'hard core work culture'. His very name sends shivers down the spines of workers around the world. Mass retrenchment is the order of the day in industries.

One point that deserves serious attention is low wage for ordinary employees and astronomical pay-packets and extra-ordinary privileges for managerial staff in the digital world. In 2021 Amazon's CEO earned almost 6,500 times the median salary of the company's remaining employees. In the same year at Tech company Expedia the ratio was 2897:1, at McDonald's 2251:1 and 1711:1 at Intel. As per AFL-CIO's Executive Pay Watch Report annual average compensation for CEOs of top 500 US companies was \$18.3 million in 2021 or 324 times the median worker's pay. The ratio was higher than the figures of previous years—299:1 in 2020 and 264:1 in 2019. This is the hard

reality of the much talked about digital economy.

Digital sector apart lay-offs and retrenchments are a regular industrial culture in formal and informal sectors as well. India, despite being a growing economy much behind the advanced capitalist economies, including China, is equally plagued by the lay-off and retrenchment syndrome.

The retrenchment in India's Public Sector Units (PSUs) is rampant. Then they have stopped recruitment in permanent category completely. They are increasingly farming out core sector jobs while vacancies are mostly filled by contractual labour, having no access to minimum protection provided by labour laws which are being continually reformed to the disadvantage of workers. Besides PSUs the Union Government itself is a big employer of contract labourers. Even the Reserve Bank of India deploys contract labourers in perennial nature of job. The same is true of state governments. According to a recent survey of the 389 PSUs only 248 are said to be viable. But labour unions dispute this claim. They say the authorities are actually preparing ground to privatise these units at throwaway prices. In some enterprises where the government has more than 50 percent stake they have slashed workforce drastically. In 2012-13 there were 17.3 lakh employees in these units but the strength came down to 14.6 lakh in 2021-22. In the month of March, 2022 contractual and casual labour component in PSUs was 42.5 percent in comparison to 19 percent in March 2013.

Seven PSUs are said to have retrenched 20,000 employees in a very short period. Of these BSNL tops the list closely followed by SAIL and MTNL. They are downsizing workforce even in profit making units. SAIL and ONGC are making huge profits but they have stopped regular recruitment while increasingly switching over to contractual practice. Meanwhile, MTNL and Air India have been sold to private players. Rumor has it that BSNL otherwise a profitable organisation may be privatised any-time threatening its staggering army of even contract labourers. Barring Indian Oil most PSUs, numbering about 13, have reduced their workforce over the years.

Official propaganda that most PSUs are white elephants is baseless and motivated. Indian Oil is a jewel in the PSU Empire but the government doesn't admit it in public. PSUs are a huge hunting ground of loot by the persons in authority.

Indian tech companies are equally ruthless like the global entities to follow the industrial culture of lay-offs and retrenchment. Forty-four Startups in India are said to have fired 16000 employees till October 2022.

Prominent Indian ED-Tech startups like BYJUS, LEAD, Vedantu, Unacademy, Trell and Lido Learning along with other companies like Ola, Zomato, Meesho, MPL, Innovator, Udaan and others have resorted to large-scale firing. All this was happening at a time when Prime Minister Modi was boasting of India's progress in Startups. Incidentally he recently organised a job fair with a lot of fanfare to hide the precarious condition of employment situation. Unemployment is more like a volcano and no amount of Modi jugglery can suppress the reality. Even the defence depart-

ment is depending on ad hoc-ism failing to fill up vacancies.

Bone-chilling reports are coming from Bengaluru-India's Silicon Valley. Startup Front Row has laid off 75 percent of its staff. This Startup business model is based on Sanfrancisco-centred Startup Master Class where celebrities teach courses in their respective disciplines. It may sound funny but it is true! The courses offered by the Startups cover singing by Neha Kakkar, Comedy by Biswa Kalyan Rath, fast bowling by Bhubaneswar Kumar, batting by Suresh Raina and spin bowling by Yuzuvendra Chahal.

Synapsica, a healthcare Startup company has laid off 30 percent of its employees citing adverse market conditions. Insiders say this Startup Company is actually trimming its workforce with a view to increase

workload. They are resetting their business. Zomato, a food delivery aggregator is said have curtailed 3 percent of its labour strength. Last year Ola sacked 500 employees. Vedantu handed out pink slips to 725 employees. Car 29 asked 500 employees to leave while Meesho and Trelle fired 300 each. Mfine, an AI-powered telemedicine mobile App, has retrenched 500 regular staff. They are creating a huge army of newly unemployed.

All companies are vigorously trying to introduce Performance Improvement Programme (PIP) forcing workers to perform enhanced target. If the workers fail to achieve the target they are given marching order. What is more supervisors treat them as animals; they frequently use filthy words. Any protest may invite suspension or sacking. In absence of union they have no option but to accept humiliation quietly. They have no right to get unionised. Even managerial officers are not safe in this environment of high workload. One officer of Cadilla, a medicine manufacturing company, had to quit job because he failed to execute PIP properly. If the stocks remain unsold due to overproduction through PIP norm workers will have to face the wrath of the management. This is what one may call unregulated capitalism.

The plight of delivery boys and girls [popularly known as gig workers] engaged in service sector companies defies description. They have no fixed working hours. No matter whether it is rainy season or summer they are to run and deliver goods to customers. They are to deliver food items early in the morning or at odd hours in the night. Then they are not salaried people, they get paltry sum on commission basis. Amount of commission varies depending on distance. Gig workers earn Rs 12000 to 15000 a

month. The company provides them a big shopper which they carry on their shoulder while riding on a two wheeler, a bicycle or a motor bike. They are not covered by any kind of social security, not even by life insurance in case of an accident. State governments are indifferent to the oppressive working conditions under which thousands of Gig workers toil. Only very recently Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah mentioned the issue of delivery employees in e-commerce companies while presenting the state budget on 7th July 2023. The chief minister and his finance minister announced that "in order to provide social security to the gig workers in the unorganised sector i.e. employed as full time or part time delivery personnel in e-commerce companies like Swiggy, Zomato, Amazon etc insurance facility of Rs 4 lakh will be provided..." The cost of the premium will be borne by the government. Incidentally before the Karnataka assembly election Congress ex-president Rahul Gandhi gave a patient hearing to the problems Gig workers face daily. Perhaps this is their follow-up action for the newly elected Congress government in Karnataka. Meanwhile, the Rajasthan Assembly has passed the Rajasthan Platform Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare Act), 2023. For one thing Rajasthan has become the first state in the country to pass a legislation ensuring social security of platform-based gig workers in the state. Incidentally no Bharatiya Janata Party ruled state has given any thought to the plight of gig workers who are multiplying in numbers every year in the fast growing digital economy.

India's rural economy is changing very fast. More and more landless labourers are seeking job in cities creating an explosive situation. Old feudal relations are breaking down but capitalism is yet to take firm

অরুণশংকর দাশ

এর কিছু উল্লেখযোগ্য গ্রন্থ

গল্প :

মহাজাগরণ ও অন্যান্য গল্প

মৃত্যুহীন প্রাণ

কবিতা :

কিছু কিছু অমোঘ কবিতা

বিপ্লব স্পন্দিত বক্ষে

বিমূর্ত ছবি মূর্ত স্মৃতি

আত্মজীবনী :

ছিন্নমূলের ছিন্ন পত্র

সাক্ষাৎকার :

চেয়ারম্যান গঞ্জালের সঙ্গে

সাক্ষাৎকার

for copies contact
ARUNSHANKAR DAS
(9830662802)
BAHUBACHAN
(6290061134)

roots in Indian agriculture. To arrest migration of large number of unemployed working age village population to cities the Centre introduced the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme [MGNREGS] to create Mandays to absorb rural labour in tertiary activities other than agrarian practice proper. The original idea was to provide work to village labourers for 100 days. In reality the authorities never succeeded in assuring work for 100 days. Despite many drawbacks it was a good scheme requiring more

budgetary allocation. But the present BJP government is gradually curtailing allocation for MGNREGS. Rs 60,000 crore allocated [at 2011-12 prices it is just 33,375 crore] in the budget for the next year (2023-24) is the lowest allocation since 2015-17. In other words they are thinking to abolish this scheme altogether. But MGNREGS has created a new area of informal sector for the unskilled unemployed in rural India. Then non-BJP states are facing discrimination in allocation. As per allegation of state BJP which is in opposition in

West Bengal, the Centre has stopped disbursement of funds making MGNREGS workers jobless. They have not yet been paid their dues. For one thing the BJP was virtually wiped out in recently-held Panchayat polls in Bengal due to their deliberate holding of wages. It is not known whether the BJP has read the writing on the wall properly. If the centre continues to deprive the state of its legitimate dues they will have to reap bitter fruits in the coming parliamentary polls.

□□□

IDEAS OF GOVERNANCE

Modi's Statecraft

Himanshu Roy

THIS PAPER DISCUSSES THE important policy initiatives of the Modi government in the past nine years. Three broad components have been focused upon: economy, army and the administration. While the economy includes the whole gamut of social-economic life of citizens, the army represents the national security, and the administration represents the instrument through which all the development works and the governance are actuated. All the three components representing the state are to be strengthened through citizen's cooperation. The administration has to be sensitive towards citizens; for, the Rashtra is above everything else.

He began his tenure with two immediate measures after he took over as the prime minister in 2014: he brought in an ordinance to remove legal obstacle to appoint Nripendra Mishra as his principal secretary, and secondly, brought in the appointment of the Officer on Special Duty (OSD) to the ministers under the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC). Earlier, the OSDs were not under the purview

of the ACC; ministers used to bring in their confidants as OSD. In the former case, Mishra as chairman of Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) was ineligible for appointment. The two acts of Modi reflected the intent of the prime minister to be decisive, and to cleanse the polity in the preceding political backdrop of the role of National Advisory Council chaired by Sonia Gandhi and of the PMO of Manmohan Singh. It was followed by meeting with secretaries of different ministries and permitting them to have access to the prime minister to expedite the formulation and application of developmental schemes, sidestepping-eliminating the procedural hurdles. Earlier, Indira Gandhi had initiated this process in 1980 which was then considered as breaking the protocol of collective governance by the Cabinet.

His office is the most digitalised, responsive, and transparent in comparison to his predecessors. As the prime minister, he has expedited and put the use of the technology to the hilt for governance in terms of actuating transparency, account-

ability, effectiveness and responsiveness in the functioning of the ministries and administration. It has resulted in the delivery of quality services to the citizens, and has acted as deterrence for the corrupt.

In the Modi's tenure, the office has wider opening for new expertise; the focus is on the new.

Ideas, and new methods of their application. From electoral reforms to delimitation of constituencies and wards, from digitalising the tendering process to bringing in new entrants in administration from non-IAS category, and also from the corporate world in the ministries and departments, in the ranks of higher administrative grade, the rapid change of reforms are visible. The government offices, earlier dominated by the civil servants and power brokers, habitual to traditional methods of functioning, are now more transparent and are open to public suggestions through digital platform. In the most recent case of Uniform Civil Code, for example, the government has received 50 lakhs suggestions till date. It has led to two way interaction: the participation in governance and the participation of the administration in understanding the public grievances and necessities. The administration has received the best of public suggestions for

the best of ways to solve their problems plaguing them. The linking of Aadhar cards with bank accounts for the direct transfer of money in the accounts of the designated beneficiaries under different governmental schemes which has minimised leakage of the fund is another marked innovative administrative reform. The digital platforms have also been used to develop a connect between the citizens and the ministries and their different wings to seek the views and proposals of the public for social change; and if found feasible, the ideas have been transformed into government policy. This has minimised the wasteful expenses and de-clogged the delivery mechanisms.

The noticeable feature of its functioning, hitherto, is to select honest and efficient civil servants from across the different tiers of services and hierarchies, who have innovative mechanisms of delivery, and place them in key positions; it is to weed out corrupt and inefficient civil servants, bring in new technology/ tools for transparency, involvement of citizens in policy making and minimise the role of lobbyists and middle men in the functioning of the administration. To expedite the delivery, Modi also directly interacts with the chief secretaries, district collectors of the different states, where the projects have been pending for long. The idea is to create a level playing situation to develop different regions which have been lagging in infrastructural development. The chief ministers have been suggested to share the best practices of executions of different schemes and projects in their states for universal application.

It may be interesting to learn that Modi used to consult Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore in administrative matters, and was inspired by the reformist Sayajirao Gaekwad of the erstwhile princely state of Baroda. Consequently, it has resulted into

creeping digital change and other innovations forcing the ministers and the officers to be constantly on work, tracking the degree of development in each ministry and in each state where the central schemes and funds are involved. This monitoring has led to rapid execution of projects which were languishing for years resulting into completion of projects on time. The ideas on digital platforms shared by different citizens from across India are passed on to the different ministries to be analysed. Once its feasibility is approved with the collated data from the ministry, it is sent to the PMO for approval. Once approved, the ideas become the policies for application. Different policies which are applicable today are either premised on the Gujarat experience or were formulated in the past 9 years. Uday Mahurkar provides graphic details of the functioning of the team which collates the data on the digital platform of the app My Gov. and shares it with the PMO and the ministries.ⁱ The point to be noted here is that there are dedicated volunteers across India who assist the government. They are researchers analysing the data as a service to the nation.ⁱⁱ More interesting is the fact that the prime minister himself suggested to the citizens on this app to assess the functioning of his government in an online poll. And the numbers of citizens voting affirmatively for the policies on line have been substantively large, larger than the numbers engaged by any single media house for any survey conducted by them at different times.

The critical public appraisal has put him at high moral pedestal that makes him unamenable to extraneous influences of caste, religion, region, etc. He chooses his officers purely on merit, of possessing innovative ideas, integrity, efficiency, and being technology savvy. The way, the bureaucracy was functioning for it-

self in the states and in the preceding central governments through different kinds of lobby needed strong measures of correction and monitoring. Bringing in the OSDs and PS to the ministers under the purview of the ACC was one such earlier measures of Modi to check lobbying. His directive to his top officers in the PMO and in the Cabinet Secretariat was to identify upright officers without any extraneous consideration. The traditional methods of selecting an officer based on his Annual Confidential Report was no longer valid as ninety percent of the officers had very high grade of appraisal which had become a norm after 2008. To overcome it, a new real time rating was evolved based on due diligence learnt from the method adopted by the New Zealand government which was found to be the best. Also, learning from TATA, USA, U.K and others, four main criteria were fixed. One of it is the integrity and efficiency of the officers which are verified from the peers' group, batch mates, seniors, and juniors. The other requirements are functional skills, domain expertise and behavioural competences. "Once an officer is cleared through this process, his or her name enters the retention pool...next the name is sent to the Central Services Board (CSB) to match his job profile... Here the secretaries of the departments are also involved. Once the name is finalised, the CSB sends it to the ACC which clears it within twenty four hours".ⁱⁱⁱ The process is applicable to different services which have resulted into vertical and lateral mobility of many non-IAS officers on different posts. A similar kind of due diligence and appointments are being followed in other services such for example as in banks, public sectors, para-military/ police organisations, etc.

Many of the top-ranking posts in such organisations which were earlier occupied by the IAS/IPS officers

are now occupied by the in-house officers of the concerned organisations. It has generated a sense of belonging and commitment towards their organisations. Plus, it has also de-clogged the opportunity for vertical mobility for in-house subordinate officers.

Modi looks at the officers and the administration as a facilitator, as a delivery mechanism; the different ministries and the departments and their wings need to coordinate for an efficient functioning; and for it, he conducts regular meetings of the heads of the administration, from Ministers and Mayors of the Municipalities to DMs to Secretaries. In the process of it he has broken many protocols. The different ministries and the departments, in the name of autonomy, were, earlier not coordinating with each other which resulted into delay in their works. Or their coordination meetings were more paper works. The actual delivery was lacking. Now, it's a team work that transcends the ministerial/departmental boundaries leading to quantum change in the performance of the administration while following the procedures strictly. Many times, to make the function smooth, the government has laid down new procedures of selection, coordination and function. One may find it interesting to note that ministers in state governments, particularly of opposition parties, write to prime minister to expedite the completion of stalled projects in their states.

The different ministries have been advised to share the development works of their ministries with the public on social media which are tracked by the My Gov. A training session of the ministries and officials was organised to explain them the procedure. Even their rating score was initiated on weekly basis.^{iv} NITI Aayog equally plays an important role in policy inputs, drafting, rec-

ommending, and advising the governments including on structural and institutional reforms are suggested to make the administration transparent and efficient in delivery. It is also to create new opportunities through opening up of new vistas.

The ease of living for the citizens, particularly for the subalterns, has been rapidly actuated through budgetary allocations, plans and administrative measures. The digital platforms have brought transparency and quick response of the administration. The ease of doing business and the speed and the scale of production has been opened up to new innovation entrepreneurs.

The focus is on the import substitution by creating and generating home production of required items. Increasing the export, and invitation to investment in new technologies in India to TNCs are equally part of the economic policies of the government. The foreign policy and the Indic diaspora are the other two instruments to deepen the economic development of the country. Rashtra is sarvopari (supreme). It is 'the organised self-interest of a whole people', as Tagore had remarked more than a century ago, best expressing itself through Indic civilisational metaphors, symbols and political icons most recently reflected in the design of new parliament and its inauguration. It has incorporated the diversity of the bottom which is best reflected in the civilian investiture ceremonies and in the electoral support base of the Lok Sabha elections. It does not look to West for cultural modernity; rather it looks deep down to its Indic past and uses its cultural resources for its current republicanism.

Modi's functioning style is close to that of Patel. Patel, since 1916, when he entered into the Ahmadabad municipality as elected representative to till 1950, or as the Congress Working Committee mem-

ber/chairperson in 1930s, was a swift and decisive leader with precision timing while being grounded in realities.^v Calling a spade a spade, he did not hesitate to take hard decisions while calculating the risks after all the permutations and combinations. His governance was visible in the municipality, and in the cabinet which was premised on rule of law, transparency, accountability, hard work and due diligence. He was stickler of procedure and took the collective along with himself including the administration and the Cabinet to execute the task which was primarily nation-building through different instrumentalities. Development of economy and modernisation of army were the prerequisite of it. He expected his party cadres to be 'disciplined and responsible' with 'no room for parochial, provincial or communal feelings'. Combined together, these were the fundamental requisites of proper administration, including adaptation and accommodation.^{vi}

A study of Modi's government policies, both at the state (Gujarat) and federal levels, of the past 20 years reflect an uncanny similarities of the two in the methods of governance deciding the priorities and policy formulation. The whole focus is on the provisions of civic amenities to the citizens, providing them health and education and livelihood opportunities development of infrastructure, industrialising the economy, security to making it efficient and sensitive towards the problem of citizens, modernising the army and keeping the nation safe. Few examples can be referred here to prove the point. The government laid down 1.77 lakh km of optical fibre in 2½ years after 2014. Before that only 358km of it was laid down in the preceding three years during the Manmohan Singh government. Similarly, the post offices in India have also began to perform the job of the

bank. The DBT is another successful operational case which has transformed the relationship between the government and the citizens. The reforms in the energy, power sector, the transfer of benefit of subsidy in fertilisers to the farmers, providing medicines at highly concessional rates to poor, opening up of new technical universities, speeding up the construction of infrastructure to prohibit the cost inflation. Comprehensive data collection and digitalisation through different legal institutional mechanisms are the other visible effects of policy measures.

The modernisation of the army, central police forces and the civil administration is another area where improvement in their working condition, and promotional avenues have been actuated in a planned way without of front to their any segment to keep them morally boosted as these are the backbone of the state apparatus.

Modi, however, has been charged

for compromising on collective governance, breaking the protocols, subordinating his ministerial colleagues, elevating the ranks of his top officials in the PMO and centralising the powers of the Cabinet in the office of the PM as in the form of American presidency. The traits, it is alleged, have been existing when he was the chief minister. His cabinet (in Gujarat) meetings used to be over in 10 minutes. Then, he used to interact informally with the ministers if the need arose. He preferred to work with the civil servants and experts. The allegations, may look genuine from a distance in absence of hard information but the fact is that Modi prefers to work with people who perform, whose ideas are innovative and transformative making the system efficient and transparent providing opportunities to everyone in every sector of life. At least, his sincerity and hard work are undoubtful and his transformative

mechanisms have delivered visible results over the decades both in Gujarat and in India. One may question his priorities, media spectacle, *razzmatazz* public display of rituals, motifs but his intent to deliver through public policies and administrative mechanisms is undoubtful. There have been few failures, but his intent to innovate, experiment with new ideas with planning, empirical data have been largely successful; and he has been stickler of the procedures which are scrupulously applied.^{vi} □□□

Endnotes

- i Uday Mahurkar, *Marching with a Billion*, Penguin, Delhi, 2017, p.xli.
- ii Ibid., p.51.
- iii Ibid., p.59.
- iv Ibid., pp.99-103.
- v For details, See Shakti Sinha and Himanshu Roy (eds.), *Patel: Political Ideas and Practice*, Sage, Delhi, 2018.
- vi Ibid., Chap. "Patel: Ideas of Governance".
- vii Pranab Mukherjee, *The Presidential Years*, Rupa, 2021, p.155.

IN SEARCH OF THE ANCESTRY

India's DNA

Ashok Nag

WHAT IS INDIA'S DNA? This rhetorical question can be addressed from two perspectives—from a political cum socio-cultural perspective or from a purely biological cum genetical perspective. What is summarised in this article is the current scientific consensus view about the uniformity or diversity of Indian populations in terms of their genetic profile or to use the oft-quoted term—DNA. This is necessary because every social formation seeks its legitimacy and differentiation from "Others" based on people's perceived ancestry.

Any living organism is made of cells. DNA-or Deoxyribonucleic Acid is a molecule within the cell that

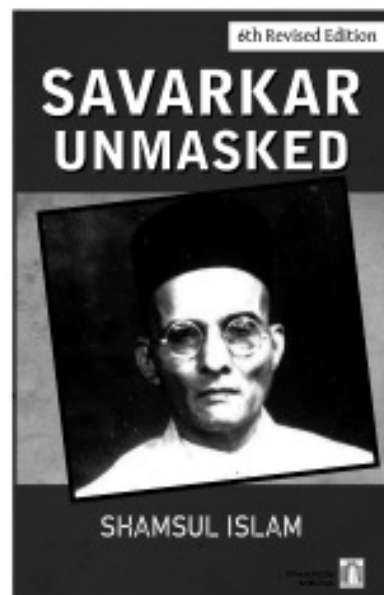
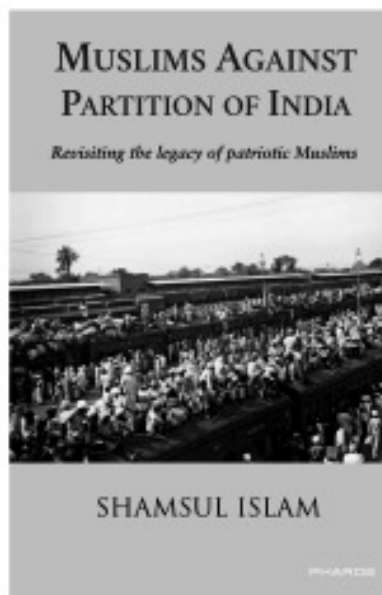
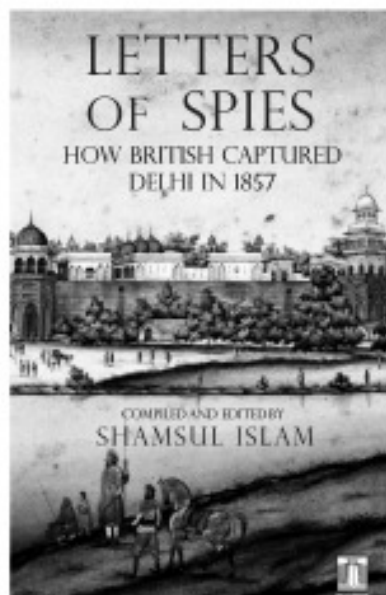
stores genetic information and the hereditary material that defines what human beings are. 'DNA is the carrier of all genetic information that our immediate parents and all ancestors bequeath to us. The modern biology has proven beyond doubt that DNA makes us what we are'.

Today, DNA based ancestry test can provide probabilistic estimates based on statistical correlation of the percentage of DNA of a given person that has been inherited from, say, European Ancestry. Technically speaking, searching for ancestry of extant population of a large country like India is always a work in progress. For example, when fossils of archaic humans (other species

belonging to Hominin group) were discovered in Hathnora on the Narmada river-bank in 1982, it opened up the distinct possibility of interbreeding between the migrant Homo Sapiens from Africa with other types of Hominins unless these archaic humans had become extinct before Homo Sapiens arrived "out of Africa". The discovered cranium was dated to 250000 years ago and the first wave of migration of Homo Sapiens from Africa is dated around 65000 years ago.

Given the current state of this branch of science, known as archaeogenetics—a combination of archaeology and genetics—two distinct ancestral components have been confirmed by most of the researchers on this subject. These are Ancestral North Indians (ANI) and Ancestral South Indians (ASI). Ancestral North Indians were the ones who are ge-

BOOKS BY SHAMSUL ISLAM



Freedom Movement & RSS — A Story of Betrayal Rs 95

Know the RSS: Based on its own documents Rs 95

Golwalkar's We or our nationhood defined: a critique with full text of the original book Rs 275

Muslims Against Partition of India — Revisiting the legacy of patriotic Muslims Rs 295

Savarkar Unmasked Rs 295

Hindu Nationalism & RSS Rs 360

Letters of Spies: How British Captured Delhi in 1857 Rs 195

Please note: Apart from English, these books are also available in various Indian languages.

SHAMSUL ISLAM taught political science at the University of Delhi. As an author, columnist and dramatist he has been writing against religious bigotry, dehumanization, totalitarianism, persecution of women, Dalits and minorities. He is known globally for fundamental research work on the rise of nationalism and its development in India and the world.



فاروس
PHAROS

Pharos Media & Publishing Pvt Limited

D-84 Abul Fazal Enclave-I
New Delhi 110025

✉ books@pharosmedia.com

📞 +91-9818120669

🐦 pharosmedia

netically related to Central Asians, Middle Easterners, Caucasians, and Europeans. Ancestral South Indians are primarily from the subcontinent and the earliest “out of Africa” migrants. Besides these two main groups, some researchers have identified two other ancestries in mainland tribal population depending on their languages—these are—Ancestral Austro-Asiatic (AAA), and Ancestral Tibeto-Burman (ATB). The ancestry of inhabitants of Andaman is distinct from mainland population but “co-ancestral to contemporary Pacific Islanders”.

Apart from ancestry or ethnic origin of Indian people, other differentiating characteristics of populations are Morphology and Linguistic lineages. Based on morphology the distinct groups are: Caucasoid, Mongoloid, Australoid and Negrito. The classification engendered by linguistic lineages are Indo-European, Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman and Austro-Asiatic. Some details of these attributes are given below.

Morphology

The word Caucasoid refers to light-skinned people from Caucasus or Caucasia which mainly comprises Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and parts of Southern Russia. When the nomadic people from this area arrived at north-western India in second Millenium BC, there was genetic admixing with local urbanised dark people.

Mongoloid is a racial term used to define people of central and eastern Asia, particularly people of Chinese origin.

Australoid is originally used as a racial term to describe the people of Southeast Asia, South Asia, Melanesia, Australia, and other regions in East Asia. The distinguishing features of these people are: Long and narrow skulls, black, curly or silky hair, dark skin colour.

Negrito is Spanish version of the

term Negro, literally meaning “little black person”. “Negritos” are restricted only to the Andaman Islands.

Linguistic Lineage

The homeland of Indo-European language has been in the landmass known as Asia Minor or modern Turkey. According to a recent study, the five major Indo-European sub-families—Celtic, Germanic, Italic, Balto-Slavic and Indo-Iranian—all emerged as distinct lineages between 4000–and 6000-years BP (before present).

Dravidian is a quintessential Indian language family, spoken mainly in southern and central India. 2000 years old written texts in Dravidian languages have been found. This family of language had influenced Vedic Sanskrit. According to one research study this language family may have been a part in the formation of all modern Indo-Aryan languages, including even larger languages such as Hindi, Bengali, Punjabi and Marathi.

Tibeto-Burman language family is spoken largely across the wide swath of Tibeto-Himalayan region up to Myanmar (previously Burma). Kuki-Chin-Naga is one of the main branches of TB languages, spoken in North-East India.

Austro-Asiatic languages comprise three main sub-branches namely, Munda, Mon-Khmer, and Khasi-Khmuic. Munda is spoken only in India while the remaining two are spoken by tribals in North-East India to people of Mainland South-East Asia.

Three-Dimensional Tapestry of Indian Population

Genetically identified Ancestry, Morphology, and Linguistic Lineage are the three dimensions that build the foundation of any group of Homo Sapiens. This three-dimensional identity of people of India gave rise to the following broad distinguishable

groups. We are using main characteristics of each Indian state in terms of these three attributes without considering admixtures that have happened over time. But such admixtures between various groups demarcated by their Genome defined Ancestry, largely abated from the time of Gupta regime (319–550 CE)—that is about 70 generations before present.

Group [ANI–Caucasoid, Indo-European]–Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, UP, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab, Delhi and Himachal Pradesh.

Group [ASI–Australoid, Dravidian]–Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Group [Mixed Genomic, Australoid, Indo-European]–Odisha, West Bengal, and Assam.

The tribal groups of India are largely concentrated in North-Eastern Indian states. They are also found in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand in a significant proportion of the state’s population. One also finds them scattered in some parts of West Bengal and Assam. They are genetically either Ancestral Austro-Asiatic or Ancestral Tibeto-Burman. Morphologically, the North-Eastern tribals are Mongoloid while the mainland tribals are Australoid. As regards Linguistic lineage of these tribals, all North-Eastern tribals speak Tibeto-Burman languages, while mainland tribals speak Austro-Asiatic languages.

If state-wise Linguistic lineage and Morphology are drawn on a map of India, it would clearly reveal a separation between southern states and Northern and Western states. There is a complete consensus among researchers in this area that ancestors of people speaking Dravidian languages arrived from “out of Africa” much earlier than those came through North-Western route.

Despite this fact, the question arises how “Hindi” which traces its lineage to Indo-European language was accorded the status of “National Language”. To understand this, one needs to understand the Genome profile of caste population of India. The dominant views of the researchers on this topic are given below:

1. From the point of genetic differentiation, the north-Indian populations are much closer to central Asians and Pakistan than their southern counterparts.
2. The above noted closeness is greater for the upper-caste populations than the middle- or lower-caste populations.
3. Even within the upper-caste populations of India, those of north India are much closer genetically to central Asians than those of south.
4. Dravidian tribals were possibly widespread throughout India

much before arrivals of Indo-European-speaking nomads (so called Aryans) through the North-western corridor. They got driven by the new migrants to southern India.

5. The genetic differentiations among Indian population are much higher, both for tribals and non-tribals, as compared to the European populations.

Conclusion

The current dominant scientific view of Genomic features of Indian populations is based on a reading of highly technical subject by a non-technical person. Be that as it may, it is important to understand, as a concerned citizen, the root of any view about “othering” of some part of Indian society as “not us”. The felt supremacy of any group, demarcated from “others” by morphology, language, nationality, or religion would look somewhat infantile when one extends focussed

view telescopically to 100K years before present. For example, imposition of Hindi over Dravidian languages will look completely irrational if people understand the sequence of emergence of different languages in India over thousands of years.

Political and policy formulation discourses need to be anchored in the genetical, morphological and linguistic lineage history of people of India before one gets swayed away with coloured history of only few centuries. As TS Elliot wrote in Four Quartet:

*Human kind
Cannot bear very much reality.
Time past and time future
What might have been and what
has been
Point to one end, which is al-
ways present. □□□*

[Note: Anyone interested in references can write to the author.
ashoknag@gmail.com]

HINDU CITY AND MUSLIM GHETTO

How Muslim Ghettos Emerged in Twentieth-century Calcutta

Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay

THROUGHOUT ITS COLONIAL history, Calcutta had been a Hindu-majority city in the heart of a Muslim-majority province. Until the mid-twentieth century, despite bitter rivalry, the city's Hindu and Muslim populations inhabited shared spaces, even in areas populated chiefly by members of one community. In such localities, there were scattered pockets where people of the other community resided, creating a complex inter-communal sharing of neighbourhoods, infrastructures, and resources. This feature of the city was evident from various colonial enquiries set up after Hindu-Muslim riots. The police-

men handling on-ground riot situations in various neighbourhoods repeatedly pointed out the difficulty of zone-marking any part of Calcutta as belonging exclusively to the Hindus or Muslims. Ghettos did not manifest to the extent they do today.

However, the city's character began to transform slowly in the inter-war decades due to the twin effects of urban renewal and communal mobilisation, culminating in an utter territorial defeat of Muslims in the religious war of 1946 which was followed by Independence, Partition, and the influx of Hindu refugees from East Pakistan. At ‘the stroke of midnight’ on August 15, 1947,

Calcutta emerged as the Hindu-majority capital city of a Hindu-majority state—West Bengal. One of the outcomes of the territorial defeat of the Muslims in Calcutta was ghetto formation on a wide scale.

Calcutta witnessed two major communal outbreaks in the inter-war era—in 1918 and 1926. These two riots were confined to an area in central Calcutta bound by Beadon Street in the north, Bowbazaar Street in the south, Strand Road in the west, and College Street in the east. These two riots were also confined among the city's prosperous Marwari trading communities and their ‘up-country’ Hindu militia on the one hand, and the Muslim working class and petty traders, residing in nearby slums and mendicant Kabuli traders (Muslims) on the other. These two groups had long-term stakes in central Calcutta's marketplaces and neighbourhoods. From the last de-

cade of the nineteenth century, this area of the city witnessed massive recycling of space through various municipal initiatives such as major street schemes, making way for gentrification.

Even though communal mobilisations had wider, and at times, pan-regional characters (especially, north-Indian communal mobilisations in the inter-war era), the riots were also local affairs, spreading their tentacles via local and immediate animosities between communities and classes. During the riots of 1918 and 1926, the class character of communal animosity became amply clear. The territorial outcomes of these riots were mixed. Even though the Muslims were in a minority position in central Calcutta, during the riots, they continued to receive support and physical enforcement of foot soldiers from the Muslim-dominated industrial belts of the city, especially from the Howrah jute belt. Muslim workers from these belts would repeatedly invade the city, crossing the river and balance the outcome of the immediate territorial loss. As a result, even in mid-1940s, central Calcutta had a communally mixed population, more heterogeneous in character than it became a decade afterwards.

Urban Planning

In 1911, the colonial authorities set up an expert-managed Improvement Trust insulated from the fast-democratising municipal corporation, whose ‘street schemes’ in the central city were deliberately run through the bustees and the ‘street-less’ neighbourhoods to produce a more legible and automobile friendly urban landscape. The violence of planned street and infrastructure building—often associated with a mix of commercial, public health and counter insurgency imperatives—valorised urban land as it became one of the prime outlets of capital in Calcutta in

the inter-war years. The Improvement Trust, which was at the helm of street building, was able to create wealth in Calcutta by means of the development and trading of property. It did so via strategic devaluation and revaluation of asset values at certain junctures in the inter-war period.

This process unfolded in the separation of the urban poor from their sites of production and social reproduction as ‘congested’ neighbourhoods and bustees in the inner city made way for viable neighbourhoods as ‘land’ in the market. This led to speculation in empty land and gentrification along the axes of class, religious communities, and ethnicity. Simultaneously, dwelling spaces were converted into commercial spaces. Because of speculation, gentrification, and commercialisation, a housing crisis arose in the inter-war period.

During the inter-war years, Calcutta also bled into its rural and semi-urban frontiers as the Improvement Trust acquired land and built infrastructures for ‘suburban expansion’ of Calcutta. Yet the vision of a class-based graded dispersal of population (from the inner city) towards the newly created suburbs failed, as land speculation reached these places before the inner-city displaced populations could be resettled. Moreover, in the southern frontiers, the urban process faced some hitherto unprecedented obstructions in the form of repeated incidents of organised ‘soil raids’, legal challenges from substantial property owners refusing compensation packages (one case from Russa Road reached the Privy Council, for instance), allegations of scam between contractors and the Trust’s officials, and the overall marshy terrain dotted with water bodies, requiring considerable mobilisation of earth and rubbish from elsewhere.

Class and communal tensions made their way through this spatial and demographic churning and pro-

duced intermittent communal riots between 1910 and 1926. In early-twentieth-century Calcutta, religious polarisation appeared in a confounding conjunction with the Improvement Trust’s street-building initiatives. The ‘rational action’ of street-building, the ‘invisible hands’ of the real estate market, and crowd action during communal outbreaks constituted each other in a complex fashion in producing the twentieth-century city. The territorial outcomes of these riots were mixed. Even though the Muslims were in a minority position in central Calcutta, during the riots, they continued to receive support and physical enforcement of foot soldiers from the Muslim-dominated industrial belts of the city, especially from the Howrah and 24-Parganas jute belt. These forces culminated in a communal civil war in 1946. The civil war enforced the territorial division of the city into a Hindu city and its Muslim ghettos.

A Civil War

Hindu-Muslim riot in Calcutta assumed the form of a total warfare between these two communities only in August 1946 (known as the ‘Great Calcutta Killings’), when religious identity of the two warring parts of the society superseded ethnic, regional, caste and class identities. The riot of 1946 exceeding its predecessors in all aspects encompassed the entire city, its suburbs, and the industrial belt. In the third week of August 1946, the violence left about 15,000 dead, 100,000 injured, and 2,000,00 individuals homeless. Its impact on the city’s Muslims was decisive and irreversible.

One of the major registers through which the Muslim defeat manifested in subsequent decades was territorial containment. The civil war in August 1946 was a zoning exercise along the communal line, which was reinforced, expanded, and

made durable by the subsequent processes of Partition and massive migration of the Hindu refugees in the city. This is the point that I wish to establish in the remaining part of this essay. I wish to document how minority ghettos, as a territorialised form of hyper visibility and containment, came into being in mid-twentieth-century Calcutta. I do not however claim that certain Muslim dominated areas did not predate these ghettos.

During the 1946 riots, it was difficult for the police officers working on the ground to mark pockets of the city as exclusively Hindu or Muslim. The neighbourhoods were mixed even in places where Muslims were in a clear minority in census terms. Here is an example from the Calcutta Disturbances Enquiry Commission that gathered considerable evidence about the police and military action during the days of the civil war:

N H Khundkar was OC of the Burtolla Police Station during August 1946. His jurisdiction had only 9 percent Muslim population as per the 1931 Census. Khundkar answered as many as 1706 questions during the proceedings of the Commission. What emerges from his deposition is a complex sociology of the civil war that calls into question existing paradigms of comprehending crowd action. It appears that Khundkar was operating from an epistemic space that was mutually incommensurable with that of the counsels. They ‘cut the world differently’ to comprehend the civil war. Khundkar’s ‘thick description’, illustrated below, frustrated the Commissioners. In the end there was a *crisis of comprehensibility*—as the Commission’s failure to uphold the ‘regime of truth’ became apparent.

Q.110: ‘Can you give us the proportion of the Hindus and Muslims living in your jurisdiction?’

Khundkar: ‘Muslims were not more than 9 percent, or a little bit more, but, after the disturbances, many Muslims have left the area. Some are selling their houses; some have just fled’.

Q.111: ‘Are they spread over the whole area in your jurisdiction, or are they in pockets?’

Khundkar: ‘They have got bustee areas, Muslim pockets here and there’.

Visibly dissatisfied with this answer, one of the Commissioners asks:

Q.112: ‘Will you kindly name these pockets in your area?’

Khundkar: ‘One was in Ram Chand Ghosh Lane. Then in Musjidbari Street. It has got no particular name. This pocket is in Musjidbari Street. Then to the south of it is Ram Chand Ghosh Lane. Then there is one Muslim pocket there in Central Avenue. There is a mosque that bears a number of Musjidbari Street. At the crossing of Musjidbari Street and Central Avenue, there is a mosque, and near it, there are two or three houses. Three Muslim families used to live in the rooms attached to the mosque. They have fled during the disturbances... Then Gulu Ostagar Lane. Here is also a Muslim pocket, side by side with Hindu residents. (SLIDE) There were big buildings and huts here, about eight houses. Then we come to near about Beadon Row. Hereabout was a mosque and attached to the side of the mosque; three or four Muslim families used to live in some rooms attached to the mosque. There were also two or three huts close by. Then we come to what is called Chidam Mudi Lane. Near about is a mosque. Nobody used

to live here, but the Mutawalli and three or four families used to live at this place. This is opposite Bhim Ghosh Lane. Here, there were no Muslim residents, but there were 2, 3 or 4 shopkeepers, Biri and cigarette sellers—Muslim shopkeepers. Then here is the police station and we are on Cornwallis Street. About this place, there is a mosque’.

Q.114: ‘Just north of the police station?’

Khundkar: ‘Not exactly north; it is northwest. Here we have got a big mansion, thereafter the residence of a Hindu gentleman. Then the mosque. By the side of that mosque, in the rooms attached to the mosque, some Kabulis used to reside. Then this is Raja Raj Kissen Street, and this is Sahitya Parishad Street. These are two populous streets. Here, there are both Muslims and Hindus...Hindus are more numerous. Between these is Goabagan Cattle Market’.

Q.115: ‘Do any Muslims live there?’

Khundkar: ‘There are Muslim cattle dealers, and some Hindu cattle dealers live mostly this side on the Sahitya Parishad Street, and the north side lives Muslims. On the north side of Raja Raj Kissen Street, there are some cattle huts, cattle khatahs they are called, almost close to Upper Circular Road. We have Muslims here’.

Q.116: ‘Scattered?’

Khundkar: ‘Almost compact, around the cattle market except on the south where the Hindu cattle dealers live. This we come to the crossing of Upper Circular Road and Vivekananda Road. This is not exactly opposite the crossing. Here we have a market called Maniktolla Market. There is a mosque, and there are few

residential huts as well as shops—Muslim shops. Here there was a Hindu shop also’.

Q.117: Is that all Muslim area?

Khundkar: No, mixed area. Muslims were very few, scattered all over. Here is a bustee at No. 76/1 Cornwallis Street, just west of the police station. This is a mixed area...

Q.118: Was there any Muslim bustee behind Ram Chand Ghosh Lane?

Khundkar: Witness (understanding that the President has no sense of the place): This is not near Ram Chand Ghosh Lane. It is south of that Lane and north of Sahitya Parishad Street.

What is important in this long conversation is how Khundkar handled a set of seemingly objective demographic questions regarding how many of which communities live where, by providing more of a visual/pictorial, i.e., qualitative description. The Commission members were trying to ‘fix’ the populations in time, space, and ratio. Khundkar, on the other hand, described mobile geographies and entangled realities of inter-communal, inter-ethnic and inter-class sharing of space. ‘Is Phulbagan Bustee a Muslim area?’ asked a commissioner. The officer replied, ‘There are Mohammedan houses as well as Hindu houses there’. A counsel clarified: ‘...also that part between Mitra Lane and Marcus Square is entirely Mohammedan’. Khundkar clarifies: ‘No, there are a lot of Hindu houses also’.

The discussion continued for the whole day on the 14th in this circular manner. It was evident that Calcutta’s spatio-demographic reality was difficult to zone-mark. On several occasions, the counsels wanted Khundkar to specify the ‘composition of the crowds’. How many Hindus and how many Muslims? Did they belong to the work-

ing class or the bhadralok class? For instance, at one point, Siddiky asked him to specify the ‘composition of the two mobs’: ‘I mean of what class they were composed?’ Khundkar replied: ‘Of the Muslim mob, some were wearing Pyjamas, some lungis...and of the Hindus, I saw young men, Bengali young men. Kalwars and low-class people on both sides’.

The Commission’s session with Khundkar remained inconclusive for want of a common measure. In other words, they failed to engage satisfactorily with each other’s ways of seeing the world. Hence, they often talked at cross-purposes. Their conversation exposed conceptual incompatibilities that highlighted the limits of their communication. Khundkar’s voice was recorded, but it was hardly heard. By the time Khundkar’s affidavit was read, its ‘context’ had already ebbed away into ‘archival compost’. The more the witness—Khundkar—clarified his affidavit; the more it appeared incomprehensible to Their Lordships.

Siddiky, a representative from the Muslim League in the Commission, was inclined to project the comparative innocence and victimhood of the Muslim community of the city. But Khundkar’s replies captured the complexity of the violence such that it frustrated any easy conclusion. At one point, Siddiky asked, ‘...by this could you judge that the mood of this Hindu mob was very bad?’ But Khundkar replied: ‘...the mood was bad on both sides. Equally bad’. Then, Siddiky anxiously asked Khundkar to give a ‘pocket-by-pocket’ breakup of the plight of the Muslims where Hindu mobs attacked them. He took up the instance of Musjidbari Street bustee: ‘And would you tell us now what happened to these 100 Muslims of Musjidbari Street?’ Khundkar replied: ‘nothing happened to them...’ ‘Not a single Muslim was

killed?’ ‘Not a single Muslim was killed because Hindus protected them’.

As already discussed, the disturbance of 1946 took on the dimensions of an undeclared civil war. The crowd movement sharpened religious boundaries in space. Its strategic formations through mobile territories claimed the streets while traversing them. In so doing, the crowds dissolved social distinctions to function as a transitory whole. The police chased the crowds to disperse them into more easily recognisable mobs. The crowds retaliated by chasing the police patrol or escaping from it. The sporadic and discrete mobility of the mob-police dyad produced a shifting spatiality in the city. On being pursued by the police, the crowds would disappear and re-form a few yards further or elsewhere. This continually kept the police patrol on the move in different directions throughout the city, blurring the boundaries of legal jurisdictions of different thanas.

However, the boundaries emerging from the civil war did not neatly overlap with the formal boundaries of the police stations. In the dialectic of boundary-breaking and boundary-preserving exercises, lines continuously moved with the mobile bodies that took the form of a crowd only by breaking and refunctioning these boundaries. Those were the moments at which power and violence intercepted each other on the street, simultaneously instigating, and electrifying those who took part in this game.

Ghettoisation

The creation of Pakistan and Calcutta’s settlement with India, coupled with the disbandment of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League and a spectacular influx of Hindu refugees in the city, produced material conditions for the ultimate territorial marginalisation of the Muslims in Calcutta.

Nearly five years after the Great

Calcutta Killings, the Census of 1951 published a 50-year trend of the Hindu–Muslim population ratio in Calcutta. The census figures registered a decline of the Muslim population in Calcutta between 1941 and 1951 by 191,603 individuals. The West Bengal government recorded a flight of 130,000 Muslims by 1951 because of the fear of disturbances. The 1961 Census found near elimination of Muslims from select wards of the city and consequent Muslim concentration in some others like Park Circus, Ekbalpore, Bowbazaar, Karaya, Narkeldanga, and Beniapur.

In this context, it is important to register the change that took place in Hindu–Muslim riots in Calcutta after ‘partitioned independence’. There were three major outbreaks in 1950, 1964, and 1992.

The 1950 riot illustrates how the riot-scape changed in Calcutta with Independence.

In February 1950, a riot broke out in wards 15 and 16, along with areas adjacent to Beadon Street, Amherst Street, and the working-class areas of the eastern frontier of the city. A section of the Congress workers, the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha activists were actively involved in this violence. Golwalkar’s presence in the Burrabazaar area of the city on 15 and 16 February was not a mere coincidence. Certain neighbourhood clubs in the affected areas were actively engaged in evicting Muslims and settling Hindu refugees in the vacant houses and hutments. Such a case was reported in the Lalbagan area in north Calcutta. In this bustee, one ‘Lalbagan Seva Samiti’ claimed to have resettled 650 refugee families in 229 vacant houses earlier occupied by Muslim tenants. The Samiti received active encouragement from the northern district committee of the Congress Party.

A remarkable feature of violence during the trouble of 1950 was the proliferation of the cases of mob lynching of Muslims inside Muslim mohallas. What is important to note here is its continuous, mundane, and unofficial nature. Many of cases that occurred before the actual carnage on 8–10 February 1950 and some continued afterwards. During her investigation, Mridula Sarabhai encountered such a case at Ismail Street in Entally:

‘On or about 8 March; I visited the place...It was quite apparent the persons who were sleeping were attacked. From the way the doors and windows, even the lavatory doors, were broken; one could see the place had been the victim of a consorted attack and all this in a Muslim Mohalla only’.

Muslims in thousands fled to locations they perceived as safer as Park Circus, Beniapur, Narkeldanga, Zakaria Street and Kidderpore. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay says that about 25,000 Muslim refugees were squatting in and around the Park Circus Maidan during the riot days. By the third week of March 1950, these refugees were all gone. The British Consulate speculated that they had ‘mostly migrated to Pakistan’. Some anecdotal evidence I collected during this research also suggest that several Muslim families who had migrated to East Pakistan in 1950, indeed returned to Calcutta within a year or so, and began to live in the Muslim dominated areas of Calcutta. Alam Khan, for instance, left for Pakistan in March 1950 with his family, when he was 9-year-old. They lived in Calcutta’s Bhowanipore—a predominantly middle-class Hindu area with a strong Sikh and Marwari presence—that witnessed severe communal clashes in 1946. When they returned to Calcutta in 1952 from Dhaka, they sold their Bhowanipore

residence and found a place in Darga Road, Park Circus.

In the next one and a half decades, February 1950 became a norm rather than an exception. The cleansing of the Muslim community continued and remained largely unreported (in media) in the refugee-dominated localities. Jabardakhal or forcible and collective encroachment on public and private property by the Hindu refugees was a double-edged sword. It was a combination of ‘encroachment-as-class’ and ‘encroachment-as-community’. As encroachment-as-class, it snatched property from the wealthy owners and the state, leading to the fragmentation of capital sunk in land. As a result, the connection between urbanisation and capital accumulation, as we found in the inter-war era at the behest of the Improvement Trust, collapsed for many years in the post-colonial metropolis in connection with a fledging competitive electoral politics. If motion refers to capital’s expanded self-reproduction, then, jabardakhal was a durable obstruction. On the other hand, as encroachment-as-community, jabardakhal dispossessed and displaced petty Muslim property owners, becoming an electrifying agent of Hinduisation of the urban space. It activated a form of spatial mobilisation that enabled ghettos to manifest as zones of containment. According to the government’s estimate in 1954, there was at least 2.39 million acres of land under refugee colonisation in Calcutta, its adjacent 24 Parganas, Howrah, Hooghly and

Frontier is available at

**SARBODAYA
BOOK STALL**

HOWRAH STATION

Nadia. As far as Calcutta was concerned, in early 1960s, Nirmal Kumar Bose found nine wards in northern, north-eastern, eastern and southern Calcutta where refugee Hindus had totally displaced Muslim labourers and artisans.

One direct impact of the sustained communal tension in the 1950s and 1960s was a growing crowding of Muslims of all classes in some of the pockets of the city, especially in south-eastern fringes such as Tangra, Tiljala and Topsia. This is a trend also being noticed by partition scholars such as Joya Chatterji and Anwesha Sengupta. Take the instance of the Dhobiatala Camp near Dhapa garbage dumping station. Here, 48 riot-torn Muslim families were stationed in 1964. An estimate of 1992 shows that this camp had a population of 5,000 individuals, of which 4,543 were Muslims.

Even the middle and upper-class Muslims of the city decided to live in these ghettos or close to the ghettos to minimise the risk of communal violence against them. What emerged consequently was communally near uniform, yet class divided and densely populated Muslim neighbourhoods which was a distinctly post-colonial phenomenon in Calcutta. Erasure of the general presence of a population group has ironically made certain practices associated with minority communities hyper-visible. The segregated ghetto did not so much mean the end of communal violence as its transformation into other forms and modalities of marginalisation and

exclusion of religious minority. An outcome of efforts to ward off and escape from large-scale, major violence, the Muslim ghetto today marks and underwrites the latent violence of a majoritarian city. Just an anecdote would suffice to prove my point made here.

On 13 January 2020, I visited an Aadhaar registration centre in Muslim dominated Beniapur in connection with another ethnographic research project. As I entered the premises, I saw a long queue of all age groups, from old ladies to children. I was puzzled since I knew that the area's residents had all completed their Aadhaar formalities already. Fearful of losing out in the 'identity race' set up by Aadhaar, they had enrolled themselves at the very inception of the scheme. Upon investigation, I realised that this was a usual sight in that Aadhaar Centre. Numerous Muslim citizens came every day to the Centre to get the spelling of their names corrected. Why? One Zeeshan told me that in four of his crucial identity documents—birth certificate, school certificate, voter ID, and Aadhaar—there were at least three versions of his name (Jishan, Zishan, Zeeshan). This ambiguity had caused him many difficulties in all kinds of situations, and he was anxious to put an end to it. An old lady told me that sarkari officials (predominantly Hindu) regularly found these Muslim names culturally alien to their regular vocabulary. So, they imposed what they thought would be the correct spelling of a given name. The second clerk would find it difficult to accept the judgement of his predecessor and would 'correct' the spelling once again in the next document. The cycle goes on. The Aadhaar registration centres in these neighbourhoods never cease to exhaust their utility.

These micro-aggressions have contaminated the Muslim experience. As a result, every Muslim in Calcutta grows up afraid that they are losing out and lagging. It is a strange kind of blackmail where the minority citizens must conform to an imposed norm of 'good' citizen behaviour. The burden of proof always lies on them.

Conclusion

Unable to take on the Hindus in territorial conflicts like before, minority ghettos attained a durable shape after Independence. Simultaneously, majoritarian violence assumed a latent form—always present in the urban common sense—in which minority ghettos stood out as obstructions, a potential rupture to the normal rhythm of the city and accumulation in real estate. The ghetto can be a prospective site for redevelopment and accumulation—a hitherto under-utilised and under-capitalised site. What is needed is just a 'correct' penetration of the land market which would drive away minority obstructions to the further frontiers of the city.

The invisibility of the Muslims in Calcutta's public discourse is however compensated by their hyper-visibility in the ghettos. For the Hindu majority and the majoritarian state, the Muslim ghetto represents a site where preparations are always underway for an imaginary battle that will eventually reduce Hindus into a minority. The ghetto is seen as the haven for radical ideas, Kashmiri terrorists, and Pakistani secret service interlopers. Like the migrants, the minorities are destined to be the subjects of a perpetual war. In this majoritarian view, the majority appropriates the tribulations of the minority, so that none can escape the spectre of the threat of minoritisation—a state where both majority and minority mirror each other as minority. □□□

For Frontier Contact

DEBABRATA SHARMA

Jatiya Bhavan Malow Ali, Jorhat
Pin 785101, Assam

BOOKS FROM SOUTH ASIA STUDY CENTRE
THE NILGIRIS

BACK TO BASICS: A J.C. KUMARAPPA READER

Edited by Pranjali Bandhu. Introduction by T.G. Jacob. Second revised and expanded edition.
 Studera Press, New Delhi, 2021.
 978-93-85883-98-9; pb; pp. 610; Rs. 995.

ENCOUNTERING THE ADIVASI QUESTION—SOUTH INDIAN NARRATIVES

by P. Bandhu and T.G. Jacob) Studera Press, New Delhi, 2019.
 978-93-8588309207; HB and as e-book; pp. 356; Rs 1795.

NATIONAL QUESTION IN INDIA: CPI DOCUMENTS 1942-1947

Edited by T.G. Jacob. Second revised edition. Studera Press, Delhi, 2017.
 978-93-85883-36-1; HB; pp. 250; Rs. 1495.

WAR AND NATIONAL LIBERATION: CPI DOCUMENTS 1939-1945

Edited by P. Bandhu and T.G. Jacob. Second revised edition. Studera Press, Delhi, 2017.
 978-93-85883-35-4; HB; pp. 312; Rs 1795.

LEFT TO RIGHT: DECLINE OF COMMUNISM IN INDIA

by T.G. Jacob
 Empower India Press, New Delhi, 2012.
 pb; pp. 278; Rs 400.

**REFLECTIONS ON THE CASTE QUESTION:
 THE DALIT SITUATION IN SOUTH INDIA**

by T.G. Jacob and P. Bandhu. Odyssey, Ootacamund, 2009.
 978-81-900615-4-4; pb; pp. 296; Rs. 545.

EASTERN MARXISM AND OTHER ESSAYS

by S.N. Nagarajan. Edited by T.G. Jacob and P. Bandhu. Odyssey, Ootacamund, 2008.
 978-81-900615-3-7; pb; pp. 220; Rs. 445.

THE TIBETAN SAGA FOR NATIONAL LIBERATION

by Pranjali Bandhu, Odyssey, Ootacamund, 2007.
 81-900615-2-6; pb; pp. 263; Rs. 495.

[For copies write to: info@studerapress.com/akshay.studerapress@gmail.com.

Ph: 011-27380218; 27383728; 9711007535.

For Left to Right: Decline of Communism in India English or Malayalam edition

Contact: Zyber Books, Calicut

Mo: 9074673688; email: zyberbooksmail@gmail.com

NO FOOD, NO SHELTER

Early Communist Activism in Kolkata

Farooque Chowdhury

HUNGER WAS A REGULAR feature in the life of the early Communist activists in Kolkata, a major city in the British colony of India. While hounded by the British imperial police-surveillance mechanism, the activists very often had no place to have a night's sleep; and that was, at times, a regular feature of daily life of the activists. "Journey" to jail was a veritable path of the persecuted, but the Communist combatants committed to the cause of the proletariat were undaunted.

Hunger and half-fed condition failed to deter Abdul Halim, one of the early day Communist organisers in India, from revolutionary work, writes Muzaffar Ahmad, another organiser of the Communist movement in those days.¹

The veteran Communist organiser Ahmad's narration: 'Many of our workers in the early days of organising the Communist movement had to pass days without finding food. There were persons making propaganda that we're getting gold from the Bolsheviks in Russia. Had they found our days without food!'

He writes:

'We came under police surveillance since the very 1922. Our letters and papers used to come through the government postal service. Many of those were seized by police from post offices. Police began to follow me openly since March 1922. It was not only the watchers, lowest ranking agents, of the police department [PD] that kept watch on me. They were also not only assistant sub-inspectors. Sub-in-

spectors of the Kolkata branch of the Special Branch [SB], the intelligence arm of the PD, started accompanying the watchers. They included Mr Moor-sheedee [mostly spelled as Murshidi]. All contacts with me were on the verge of snapping. I began passing whole days in the home of friend Kutubuddin Ahmad's home, 7, Moulabee Lane. On a May Day, probably May 17, in 1923, Mr Keed, deputy commissioner of the SB, arrested me from Mr Kutubuddin's home. A few days later I was held captive as a State Prisoner under the Bengal State Prisoners Act of 1818. In 1924, the Kanpur Conspiracy Case was initiated against us. During my [Muzaffar Ahmad] absence from Kolkata due to internment related to the conspiracy case, Halim got acquainted with Shachindra Nath Sanyal and his workers. It was heard that Mr Sanyal distributed one *Red Manifesto*, which was a mixture of ideas of terrorism and communism. The Book Company at College Square used to import a few Marxist literatures.

Dhaka [then spelled as *Dacca*] House, 41, Zakaria Street, Kolkata has to be cited if there's any discussion on the Communists of the 1930s. Halim faced a precarious situation in 1931. One needs a place to sleep at night even if the person goes hungry. Halim and his comrades had no such berth to sleep at night. They faced the situation of passing nights on footpath. The Communist Party faces ex-

istential situation when important workers of the party face such a position. In such a situation, three students came forward to help. They were Noor Mohammad and Atoolchandra Chanda from the Kolkata Medical College, and Hatim Ali Khan of the University Law College.

The students lived in three rooms at the right side on level three in the Dhaka House. They rented in the rooms. The students allowed Halim and his comrades to live in the room in the middle of the three. That was room number 25. Noor Mohammad was son of a cloth trader in Shantipur. Atoolchandra Chanda was originally from Bakerganj [now in Bangladesh]. His father was working in Delhi as Superintendent of India Government Press. Hatim Ali Khan was from a well-off family in Mymensingh [now in Bangladesh]. The three students studied Marxism. Among them, Noor Mohammad and Atoolchandra's extent of Marxist study was wider. They not only spared a room to Halim and his comrades, but also made financial contributions. Medical college students used to get larger amount of money from home. Noor Mohammad and Atoolchandra were involved with other work of the party. Halim and his comrades brought out the weekly *Majoor-Chaashee* [Workers-Peasants] with the financial help of these students. Noor Mohammad died of Meningitis in 1934. Prior to that, the party had no trace of Hatim Ali Khan. Today [July 5, 1966], only Doctor Atoolchandra Chanda is there. His health is lost. He is the Visiting Surgeon at the Medical College. Many of the party activists, at

later times, visited Dr Chanda for medical purpose. But, only a few of them know the way Dr Chanda and Noor Mohammad sheltered the party. The room 25 was not only shelter of Halim and his comrades; that was also undeclared office of the party.

On Communist press in Kolkata, Muzaffar Ahmad writes:

'It is not wrong if it's claimed that Abdul Halim was the pioneer of Communist press in Bengal. *Mazdoor* [Worker], an Urdu weekly, was brought out in the 1920s under the editorship of Mr Kutubuddin Ahmad. It was limited to a few numbers. The first number of *Laangal* [Plough], a *Baanglaa* weekly, came out on December 25, 1925. Halim assisted, if not a lot, the weekly. I came back to Kolkata, after my release from jail, on January 2, 1926, and the responsibility of editing and directing the *Laangal* gradually was shouldered on me. *Laangal* was rechristened as *Ganabaanee* [People's Message]. I was also editing *Ganabaanee*. With both of the responsibilities, Halim was my closest associate. But, effective drive for Communist journalism was in the 1930s. Abdul Halim's role was pioneering in the initiative. And, there was not a single newspaper; there were many such: *Majoor-Chaashee*, *Maarxbaadee* [Marxist], *Maarxpanthee* [Marxist], *Ganashaktee* [People Power], etc'.

The veteran Communist leader writes:

'On March 20, 1929, we, Philip Sprat, Ajodhaa Prasad, Shamsul Huda and me, were arrested from a flat at level two at 2/1 European Asylum Lane, Kolkata. We were arrested in connection to the Meerut Conspiracy Case. The flat was the office of the Workers' and Peasants' Party

[WPP]. The office was shifted from there after our arrest. Halim found a room for office after a lot of effort. The new office was at Chowdhury Building, Chittaranjan Avenue. Mr Atoolchandra Gupta, president of the WPP, financially helped Halim in renting in the room. Mr Gupta was a renowned advocate practising at High Court'.

On Abdul Halim, Muzaffar Ahmad writes:

'As an organiser of the Communist movement Halim was put behind bars repeatedly. He was sent to prison after sentenced by court, as well as detained without trial. Abdul Halim and many Communists were treated as Third Class prisoners, not as political prisoners. Halim was in jail around the later part of the 1930s. He was detained without trial after the beginning of the World War-II. He was near-to-death during that time as he was conducting hunger strike in the Presidency Jail, Kolkata. He could be saved only after transferring him to the Medical College Hospital for better treatment'.

On political education behind bars, Muzaffar Ahmad writes:

'Armed revolutionaries [abiding by terrorist tact], who were sent to jails or detention camps, sentenced or detained without trial, began looking at reality with a new approach since the beginning of the 1930s. Influence of Idealism among them was receding. They began studying Marxism-Leninism. No doubt, the statement that the prisoners under the Meerut Conspiracy Case issued impacted the armed revolutionaries. Abdul Halim, Saroj Mukherjee, and other comrades also contributed in this development. These comrades were interned repeatedly. The

armed revolutionaries in prisons who accepted Communist ideas were organised within Communist Consolidation² and with discipline. This was Abdul Halim's noteworthy contribution. The new-comers were not offered Communist Party membership in jail. Party branches were not also organised there. This approach was followed not only within jails in mainland, but also in the prison in the Andamans. The Communist Consolidation within jails was Abdul Halim's major contribution in the organisational life of our party'.

Abdul Halim and Saroj Mukherjee, two prominent Communist leaders in Bengal, incarcerated in Alipur Jail in Kolkata had an important role in setting up a Marxist League inside that jail. 'Abdul Halim and Saroj Mukherjee, on behalf of the Bengal committee of the Communist Party of India, in messages sent through political prisoners deported to the Andamans from Alipur Jail appealed to Communist-minded prisoners in the Cellular Jail, the Andamans, to unite in a Communist Consolidation to study collectively and extend their influence on other political prisoners'.³

Saroj Mukhopadhyay [also Mukherjee] writes about the condition of party work after the Meerut Conspiracy Case:

'The few workers of the party who were outside of jail lost contact with each other. The central leadership of the party was demolished. Communists in different provinces and areas, especially in Bombay [today Mumbai], Lahore, Kolkata continued work in a condition isolated from each other. Contact between them was very weak. The only contact between them was through the conspiracy case prisoners. During that period,

comrade Halim continued work in Kolkata for building up a strong party. But, it was very difficult to continue work of the party. All work had to be done behind surveillance by police. There was no worker, no money. Even, shelter and provision for food was absent. Comrade Halim devoted all his time to recruit workers in this condition. It happened that police arrested him immediately after initiating work following streamlining organisation a bit, and everything was thrown about. During the 1930-32 period, comrade Halim began work with eight activists recruited by him. Before to that he was arrested in 1930 on charge of seditious writing. Statement of prisoners held under the Meerut Conspiracy Case presented the path to people's revolutionary movement and India's complete independence, and it influenced many young minds. However, work of organising workers' and peasants' movement imbued with teachings of Marxism does not happen spontaneously. Comrade Halim began this work of teaching carefully—discussions with patience and initiating study of Marxist literature. Within two years he organised a number of young activists, and sent them to different industrial areas to organise movement. He went to consult comrade Muzaffar Ahmad in Meerut Jail. Kolkata Committee of the Communist Party was organised. Comrade Muzaffar Ahmad came to Kolkata at the autumn of 1931, on a few days' of leave from Meerut Jail. Method of work of the Kolkata Committee was specified through discussion with him. The Kolkata Committee issued an appeal—"A united, strong, centralised Com-

munist Party is to be organized all over India. Its work will be conducted secretly; and its members and sympathizers will work to organize movement and organization of workers, peasants, students and youth". Comrade Halim was selected as general secretary of the party. The Communist Party of China, in a letter, supported the call of the Kolkata Committee. A joint appeal of the Communist Parties of Britain, Germany and China also told about a united Communist Party in India. An all India conference was held secretly in Kolkata in 1933, and that was with the initiative of comrade Abdul Halim. With this conference, the Communist Party of India was again organised; and the central committee of the party was elected. Comrade Halim was elected member of the central committee. Within these four years, 110 members of the party were recruited in Bengal. Comrade Halim organised seeds of the party in different districts of Bengal. Contacts and party centre was organised in the districts of Kolkata including Barrackpur, Howrah, Hoogly, Bardhaman [mostly spelled as Burdawan] and Jashore [now, in Bangladesh, and once spelled as Jessore]. Later, district committees were also organised in these five districts'.⁴

Saroj Mukhopadhyay writes:

'While organising party, comrade Halim continued with organising trade unions in areas including Belegghata, Lilua, Metiaburuj, Ghushuree, Rajganj, Barrackpur. Organising unions among labourers working in the railways, tramways, Gardenrich Workshop, jute mills, taxi cabs and buses continued. Comrade Halim always focused on at-

tracting workers to the ideology of socialism; and party cadres created as mere trade union movement was not enough to him. He trained up one whole timer from the railways and jute mills at Belegghata while he was working there. He used to conduct political education classes after organising Young Workers' League at Metiaburuj. From that League 4-5 good activists came up. He found a few more activists while working at Rajganj. Among them, comrade Faarooke has passed away. During this time he built up a number of laborers as party members. Around 1933, Marxist Students' League, a students' organisation, was organised with the direction of comrade Halim. He entrusted four student workers to organise the League. With the initiative of these students, a cultural function was organised at the University Institute in 1933. The purpose of organising this cultural function was to collect money for the Meerut Conspiracy Case Defense Fund. Comrade Halim was the central figure in organising the function. He assembled singers, dancers and musicians for the cultural function'.

Abdul Halim writes about Muzaffar Ahmad and the early days of activism:

'Slender comrade Muzaffar Ahmad, with his failing health, had no home, no place to reside. He had to go without food most of the days. The same was with mine. At one stage, Muzaffar and I roamed around at daytime, talked to friends at their messes or homes, took meal at food shops, and, as night set in, passed at some convenient place. At this period, we passed many nights in a home at Goomghar Lane near

Chadnee. There, Muzaffar once was house tutor in one respectable Muslim family. Muzaffar had close relationship with the family. They had high respect for Muzaffar. The home was always open to us. Our main centre of gathering was the home of Kutubuddin Ahmad. That home was the source of our inspiration for many days. We passed many days in that home. We, in that home, used to stay in a small room. But there was neither bedding nor pillows. We had only dhootee, the long cloth many males wear in this Sub-Continent, and shirt. Kutubuddin Ahmad had a lot of contribution to the labour movement, and to the spread of Marxist, communist literature. It would have been impossible for us had we no sympathy and financial help from him. He was colleague of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a frontline Indian National Congress leader, manager of Urdu periodical Al Helaal. He partici-

pated in the labour movements that spontaneously emerged during the Non-cooperation Movement. He was also general secretary of the Khaansaamaa [mostly spelled as Khansama] Union in Kolkata. All *khaansaamaas*, *orderlies*, cooks and waiters brought to standstill hotels in Kolkata including the Grand Hotel and Continental with their strike under the leadership of this union. The strikers dunned the English rulers in Kolkata, which was an appropriate action to audacity of the rulers. My first lesson with labour movement was with that union. Comrade Muzaffar was scheduled to join the 4th Congress of the Communist International in Moscow in 1922. But he couldn't, as there was strong restriction on his travelling abroad. Even, he attempted to go in guise of a loader in a ship. But that attempt also failed. I took a job in a sauce factory at *Cheengreepotaa* [mostly spelled

as *Chingripota*], as I had no provision for food. Doctor T N Roy helped me to get the job. But that job couldn't be carried on for long. Then, I, a penniless person, was on the streets, moving forward'.⁵

But, these penniless persons strode towards organising the exploited, and made advances in their organising activities. "[G]rowing popularity of the Communist Party of India (CPI) alarmed the colonial authorities, which took several measures against Indian communists. The British government's hostility heightened in the wake of the [...] perception that their [communists'] movement was likely to develop and succeed as a strong anti-imperialist movement. [...] Colonial authorities and officials expressed their anxiety against the communists. [...] [T]he All-India Council of the European Association opined that 'Communism [...] makes use of every weapon to overthrow the Ordered government. [...] The General Secretary of the Association wrote to the Secretary

সাংস্কৃতিক সমসময়

৩৬ বর্ষ, সংখ্যা ১৪১

অক্টোবর ২০২৩

এই সংখ্যার বিষয়সূচী

জাঁ-রিশার ব্লখ

বদরুদ্দিন উমর

চমন লাল

সব্যসাচী দেব

শুভাশিস মুখোপাধ্যায়

জয়ন্তকুমার ঘোষাল

কণিষ্ক চৌধুরী

অশোক চট্টোপাধ্যায়

নোটন কর

অভিজিৎ সেনগুপ্ত

ওমর তারেক চৌধুরী

তারাশঙ্কর ভট্টাচার্য

প্রীতিলতা বিশ্বাস

দেবাশিস চক্রবর্তী

অলকরঞ্জন বসুচৌধুরী

তরুণকুমার দে

এছাড়া নিবন্ধ গল্প কবিতা

প্রকাশিত হবে সেপ্টেম্বরের প্রথম সপ্তাহে

দাম ১৫০ টাকা

যোগাযোগ : ৯৪৩৩৫৮৮৬৩২ / ৮২৭৪৮২৬৬৩০

of State for India, on 27 May 1934, [...] for the extension of the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1932) in order to enable the government to combat communism.”⁶

Reactions—fear, and resort to suppressive measures—of the class enemies of the Communists evince strength the Communists gathered over time. It also record [1] exploiting interest’s hatred to the Communists, and [2] limitation of political measures of the interests, which induce them to resort to and sharpening of criminal law—a show of weakness, indeed.

The city—Kolkata [then, Calcutta]—was an important area of political activity as a document of the colonial rulers cites:

“Calcutta”, states the 384-page compilation of Intelligence Bureau (IB) reports, etc. includ-

ing notes by the editor, “was the centre of the activities of Muzaffar Ahmad, Shib Nath Banerji, Kutubuddin and Soumendra Tagore. In one of his many letters to the Indian ‘comrades’ [M N] Roy had said: ‘The main fields of our activities should be Bengal and Bombay’.”⁷

In an earlier section, the compilation said: “Roy’s correspondence with Muzaffar Ahmad at this period showed that the latter had received and distributed copies of *The Vanguard* [a journal brought out by M N Roy and others] and of the International Press Correspondence. Roy, writing in July said that the delegation from India to IV Congress of the Communist International was necessary, and enclosed a letter to Chiraranjan Das (son of C R Das) and Subhas Bose (Chief Executive Officer of the Calcutta Corporation), which Muzaffar Ahmad was desired to hand to the addressees”.⁸

Role of press/literature had crucial role in political activism, as the imperialist rulers found: “The Vanguard [...] exercised a considerable influence on a certain class of Indian newspapers. The ‘Amrita Bazar Patrika’ [...] made free use of its sentiments and phraseology; as also did another Calcutta paper, the ‘Atma Sakti’ [Atta Shaktee], directed by a group of Bengal revolutionaries. [...] [Q]uite a crop of new papers with a Communist policy, drawing their inspiration from the ‘Vanguard’ appeared in various parts of India—notably two weeklies in Calcutta: one, a short-lived publication, edited by Nalini Gupta’s recruit of Muzaffar Ahmed, and the other, the ‘Dhumketu’ [Dhoomketoo [Comet]], a Bengal revolutionaries’ organ: the ‘Deshar Bani’ [Deshar Baanee [Country’s Message]] (Noakhali, Bengal [today in Bangladesh]) [...] of which hereafter”.⁹

However, the rulers had amazing

“findings” also, as the 385-page compilation of weekly IB reports, documents, etc., and with extensive notes by the editor, who was one of the convicts in the Chittagong [now, Chattogram in Bangladesh] Armoury Raid Case, cites an intelligence document, which claims as “List of Soviet Secret Service Agents in India” [dated December 6, 2023]. The hilarious claim “discovered” such “Soviet agent” in Kolkata bearing name of “Fedor Vassilievitch Streltsov” on “21.9.23”, and another one named “L I Shrafuddin Ogli” on “3.12.23”!¹⁰ While a handful of Communists were struggling with hunger, destitution and shelter-less condition, and waging a fight to organise the exploited, the imperial masters “found” imagery figures from the “Soviet” land to “propagate” communism in Kolkata. The sharp eyes of the masters also amazingly found, as a lot of their documents in the two volumes cited above show, a “lot of money” from “Lenin and/or his Bolshevik comrades”, not with these words in the documents, “sent” to their Indian comrades. Specific amounts of money were mentioned in many of the documents! But the masters missed one fact: Human spirit—human spirit for liberation, spirit of the exploited to smash down system of exploitation. This spirit strengthened and widened political and organisational work by a handful of Communist revolutionaries, Muzaffar, Halim, and their comrades, to reach a wide section of the working people in this subcontinent, to challenge the imperial masters, to organise the exploited souls’ courageous raisings for emancipation.¹¹ □□□

Note:

1. “Aamaar paitaalleesh bachharer saathee”, “My comrade for forty-five years”, in Abdul Halim, Nabajeebaner Pathhe, National Book Agency,

URGENT APPEAL

This unique world law fortnightly—perhaps the only law journal in India which regularly publishes important foreign and international courts’ decisions—as also provides copious information regarding the socio-economic/political conditions of various countries the world over and invites/publishes thought provoking articles on the pressing problems and crises faced by the people of the world in various spheres—is running on heavy losses and is IN DANGER OF BEING CLOSED DOWN SOON unless subscribers, admirers/well-wishers rise to the occasion and render crucial help in the form of causing many more subscriptions, advertisements (Rs 15,000 or more) and donations at the earliest and regularly. Hope and request all such sympathetic persons/institutions would chip in with their precious aid.

—Publisher, Editor, LAW

CONTACT

I. BALAMANI

Publisher **Law Animated World**

6-3-1243/156, M.S. Makta,

HYDERABAD-500082, India.

Ph: 040-23300284

Email: mani.bal44@gmail.com

Annual subscription: Rs. 1600/-

Life subscription: Rs. 20,000/-

- Kolkata, September 1990. All following citations from Muzaffar Ahmad are from the same source.
2. Sumit Sarkar writes in *Modern India 1885-1947* (Delhi, India, 1998): "In Bengal [...], the real spread of Communism into the districts came with the large-scale conversion of terrorists to Marxism in detention camps and in the Andamans [...] through intense ideological debates and heroic self-searching. From terrorism came [a number of] Bengal Communist leaders [...]"
 3. Satyendra Narayan Majumdar, *In Search of a Revolutionary Ideology and Revolutionary Programme*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, India, 1979
 4. "Comrade Abdul Halim", in Abdul Halim, op. cit. The following citation is also from Saroj Mukhopadhyay.
 5. "Nabajeebaner pathe", in Abdul Halim, op. cit.
 6. Habib Manzer, "British measures against Indian Communists, 1934-37", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 65, 2004
 7. Mahadevaprasad Saha (ed.) *Communism in India 1924-1927*, [by] Sir David Petrie, Editions Indian, Calcutta, 1958. David Petrie was director of Intelligence Bureau, Government of India in 1924. The original edition, according to the editor of the compilation, of printed 165 copies only, "was exclusively intended for those officers of British Government, in India and abroad, whose duty was to carry on espionage against Communist and revolutionary nationalists in India, countries on her borders and other parts of the world so that planned and systematic measures could be taken to suppress the anti-British movements in India [...]" The editor reminds readers: "Strictly speaking David Petrie was not the author of this book. It was compiled by various hands in the Intelligence Bureau [...] [a]nd according to the practice of the government departments David Petrie the head of the Intelligence Bureau became its author." The ruthless intelligence officer was, the editor writes, "intimate friend of Sir Charles Tegart, the notorious Commissioner of Police, Calcutta." Preface by Petrie in the first edition was dated "1st September 1927".
 8. *ibid.*
 9. Subodh Roy (compiled and edited), *Communism in India* [by] Sir Cecil Kaye, with Unpublished Documents from National Archives of India (1919-1924), Editions Indian, Calcutta, 1971
 10. *ibid.*

HOW TO COMBAT COMMUNALISM

Communalism, Fundamentalism and Obscurantism

Aloke Mukherjee

IT HAS BECOME A FASHION amongst most of the progressive democrats, to use communalism, fundamentalism and religious obscurantism as mutually exchangeable terms expressing as one and the same phenomenon. For one thing even the Marxists of different hues follow suit. They fail to understand that this trend tends to help not only to cover up the sinister ideology of communalism and the activities based on it but also to expand it. As a result a large section of progressive democrats flood the media agitating for the movement against hijab in Iran or opportunity of women's education in Afghanistan instead of standing against the imperialist conspiracies of "war between two civilisations". More worsening is that their chorus goes on when the same people remain silent on the attacks on the opportunity

of education of minorities, especially the minority girls, the most affected ones.

Communalism is an active ideology of an alliance of classes to lead a community against another in violent as well as nonviolent manner. Those community divides may be based on religion, language, ethnic groups or something else. The objective being to suppress the other community as well as to drive a wedge between two communities to serve the interest of the ruling clique. This communal ideology has nothing to do with religion, language or ethnicity, but to utilise differences among them to serve the political, economic and societal interest of a small group.

Since the real objective is to establish hegemony over political, economic and societal life of the country it generally develops basing

on majority community. Because of its majority character this majoritarian force is aggressive by nature. This aggression is not always violent, but all-pervasive ideological, cultural, economic and political aggression. So it can take both violent and nonviolent form. In this situation if democratic forces are weak or fail to carry on their duty properly, the minority people are forced to organise themselves to resist attacks of the majority. This is also one form of community based organisation, communalism in the broad sense of the term. But in general this minority communalism is defensive by nature.

Naturally the attitude to treat majority and minority, aggressive and defensive, communalism at par weakens the democratic value. The duty of the democratic forces is to stand by the side of the minority against any attack or attempt to suppress them, by violent or non-violent method. This will on the one hand weaken the majoritarian communalism and on the other stop minority people to be led towards minority communalism. Any attempt

to treat the weak and aggressed at par with the strong and aggressive forces, helps the latter.

In case of communalism, religion is only a weapon to conspire effectively. A small group spreads communalism in the society to establish or to ensure its political, economic and societal hegemony. They do it to divide the oppressed and exploited people on the basis of communal hatred to fulfill their own interests, and to divide the oppressed and exploited people.

Fundamentalism is to obey the religious scriptures and 'blind' beliefs based on religious scriptures as unchangeable. Its harmful effects are limited among the people of a particular religion, people of other religions are not affected by it. As a result those particular people remain bounded by some types of narrow and retrogressive ideas. When a community is led on the basis of such narrow and retrogressive ideas its leaders are always afraid that the shell might burst.

So at the least provocation or any influence of progressiveness the leaders try to unite the people of same faith, so that people do not go outside the orbit. Then communalists attempt to use it in their own interest.

Though fundamentalism and communalism are not one and the same, communalists can utilise it for their gain. It is true not only for minority people but also for the majority. Rather being afraid of progressives within Hindus the majoritarian communalism seeks resort to fundamentalism within that religion. Thus the Hindu fundamentalists try to enforce caste divide, food restrictions and strong action against 'love jihad'. Communalists accelerate it to lead towards violent communalist activities.

On the other the fundamentalists among the Muslims in their

attempt to oppose any effort to ban 'triple talaq' in a haste as attack on religion ends up in mobilisation based on religion.

It is true that the fundamentalists in general want their ideology to be pursued within their religious community. In that sense all fundamentalists are not communal. Attempts are made to remove the difference between communalism and fundamentalism. And the more the majority fundamentalism is drawn in the conspiracy of majority communalism, the more the fundamentalists of minority community try to unite amongst themselves as defensive measure and the communalists working within minorities take the field. The process goes on repeating and communalism gains upper-hand.

Third question is on religious obscurantism. It is blind faith on a particular religion. An obscurantist leads the life believing the religious instructions blindly like a frog in the well. They wish to find liberty through religious rites. Such is their frog-in-the-well mindset that they cannot believe men had stepped upon the moon, even thinking like that is sin. Such people can be found both among Hindus and Muslims. Since they live depending upon religion, in general they do not have liking for other religions.

But if they can be influenced by communal propaganda that their religion is at danger because of another religion, they turn out to be militant communalists.

Even then so long the obscurantists are not threatened by the possibility of attack from some other religion they remain in the shell of themselves. Their obscurantism does not take the shape of communalism.

Yet in the name of progressiveness a strong section of so-called rationalists pinpoint their attack

against obscurantists and fundamentalists as soft targets, instead of the communalists who are organised force politically and economically.

Referring to Feuerbach Marx said: Feuerbach, consequently, (in another text it is 'therefore'), does not see that the "religious sentiment" is itself a social product, and that the abstract individual whom he analyses belongs to a particular form of society. [*Karl Marx, Theses On Feuerbach*, VII, Marx-Engels Selected Works, P 29]

Many carry on hair splitting debates on whether the present rule is Hindutvabadi fascist, or Hindu fascist, or religious fascist or some other type. True 'Without revolutionary theory there cannot be revolution', so such hair splitting is necessary.

But there is no difference among all democrats that today majority communalism is a grave danger. And this danger is being aggravated by the present dispensation of rulers at the centre. Nor is there any difference that in India the main reason of the backwardness of the minorities is lack of education due to historical, social and economic reasons. The Sachar Commission Report brought to the fore that the minorities have been kept backward historically. After the Report was placed the then UPA had to take certain affirmative steps for the education of Muslims. One of them was to introduce scholarships for the religious minority students at the school level. As a result the number of minority students attending schools increased, important part being number of girl students also increased visibly. One survey shows that nearly 50 lakh students utilised that opportunity, half of which were girls. [*The Telegraph*, 22 December, 2022]

The present rulers in their two terms have attacked this twice. First,

not more than two of a family would be entitled to scholarship. Then making right to education as excuse they decided since up to eighth standard school education is free and government assistance is given, no further assistance is necessary and it is being withdrawn. Their argument is scholarship is being continued from class ix. But the scholarship was to bring the students who are historically backward economically and educationally. Any socially conscious person will understand assistances such as fees, books or midday meal have reduced the rate of dropouts but those who are socially, economically and educationally backward need extra assistance.

This is what one may call non-violent communalism.

Similarly attempts are there to withdraw the Moulana Azad National Scholarship for five years for the minority community students pursuing higher education like M Phil or PhD.

But voices of protest from the democrats are feeble. Many democrats do not keep information of such nonviolent but heinous communalism going on inside the country. But the same people raise their voices on Iran or Qatar. In reality this sensitiveness has two sources: inherent superiority complex which breeds communalism unconsciously and the propaganda machinery of the US imperialists.

Otherwise the same people of India who are so much concerned on hijab are totally insensitive when arrangements are on to throw a

large number of girl students by withdrawing scholarship.

True, fundamentalism and obscurantism should also be opposed. For that the spread of knowledge about the world, society and science is needed within the particular community. Spread of education will enhance it. Communalists are opposed to it.

Communalism essentially leads a section of society against another serving the interest of a particular class or clique in India. That clique is aligned with imperialism, big capital and feudalism. Fight against communalism means to advance towards wiping out that clique. Difference must be drawn among fundamentalism, religious obscurantism and communalism so that the fight against communalism doesn't get diluted. □

AN ACCOUNT OF COMMUNAL MOBILISATION

A Discourse on 'Riot Politics' in Gujarat

Arup Kumar Sen

GUJARAT HAS PLAYED A leading role in initiating a new paradigm of anti-Muslim Hindu majoritarian politics in neoliberal India. A recent book, *Riot Politics: Hindu-Muslim Violence and the Indian State*, authored by Ward Berenschot (C Hurst & Co, London, 2011; Indian Edition, Rupa, New Delhi, 2013), has offered an ethnographic reading of the genealogy of 'Riot Politics' in the context of Gujarat.

Berenschot has located the birth of anti-Muslim violent Hindutva politics in Gujarat in the perspective of the decline of the 'Congress System'. He observed: "Up until the late 1960s the Congress party controlled the main structures that mediated between state institutions and citizens...The patronage channels around Congress and the TLA (Textile Labour Association) gradu-

ally began to change in the 1960s and 1970s." (pp. 63-64). He noted in this context that the Gandhian trade union, TLA, had over 100,000 members in the 1960s, and it was a major player in Gujarat politics (p. 59). He argued that the "TLA's accommodating stance vis-à-vis the mill owners did not, however, lead to lasting support among the workers for more radical trade unions. Some alternative trade unions were set up, but they never managed to gain a foothold in Gujarat." (p.63).

The author has situated the decline of the TLA in the perspective of the gradual collapse of the textile industry in Gujarat and rise of foot-loose labour in the State: "From the late 1970s fifty-two of Ahmedabad's sixty textile mills closed down... By the end of the 1990s only eight mills were still operational, employ-

ing around 25,000 people. As a result, the economic prospects of the poorest sections of society deteriorated. The available jobs for these workers have increasingly been informalised; those who lost their regular jobs at the textile mills had to settle for lower daily-wage jobs that are, generally, un-registered and unregulated. (p. 66)

In fact, the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Hindutva outfits are organically connected both with the decline of the Congress and birth of neoliberal capitalism in the soil of Gujarat. To put it in the words of the author: "The gradual demise of Congress' and the TLA's grassroots networks created opportunities for a new kind of politics. Hindu-nationalist organisations gradually managed to fill the vacuum created by the demise of these older networks... The 1985 riots marked the end of Congress' dominance in Gujarat... Since that year the BJP has been Gujarat's biggest party. The rise of the BJP

was accompanied by increasing Hindu-Muslim tensions, culminating in Hindu-Muslim riots in 1990, 1991, 1992 and 2002.” (pp. 67-68)

In his ethnographic study, Berenschot has explored the modes of politicisation of Gujarat neighbourhoods and functioning of *chamchas*. He argued in this context: “The state’s infrastructural power has not developed to such an extent that the newly developed services are easily accessible. This has led to replacement of the elder dignitaries of the older civic institutions by local politicians and their *chamchas* as the most influential figures in Gujarat’s neighbourhood life... this coming of the *chamchas* has engendered local political networks that, in 2002, could be used to mobilise people for violence”. (p. 43)

The author has also explored the nexus between politicians, state officials and goondas in Gujarat (See pp. 121-136). He narrated the story of a person, who became a hero after his violent role in 2002 riots in Gujarat:

“In March 2002, Shailesh Macwana was leading mobs on violent raids throughout Isanpur. He encouraged mobs to attack Muslim localities, he set fire to several houses, and some resi-

dents say that he personally killed a few Muslims. He gave speeches in several chawls about the dangers that Muslims were posing, and he intimidated those appealing for peace. At the same time Shailesh Macwana and his supporters were providing relief to the Dalit and upper-caste residents of Isanpur...

Shailesh Macwana was arrested after the first, most intense weeks of rioting; the police charged him with murder and rioting. The arrest provoked widespread protest and the police, thus pressurised, decided after three months that the BJP politician should be released... But when he was released, he had become a local hero. The BJP supported his candidature for the state elections and ten months later he won a seat in what many considered to be a Congress constituency... Shailesh Macwana himself attributes his victory to his activities during the riots...” (p. 158)

Berenschot documented the convergence of money power and muscle power in the local politics of Gujarat: “Goondas are also indispensable for the money that they bring in; Pradeepbhai mentioned how he contributed to Shailesh Macwana’s

campaigning budget... A large part of this budget is collected throughout the year in the form of *hapta*, the regular payments that owners of illegal businesses pay to the police and politicians to prevent arrest or harassment.” (p. 125)

While locating the ‘infrastructure of violence’ in the context of Gujarat riots of 2002, the author observed: “According to several informants the VHP and the RSS started organising new weekly meetings inside the chawls in Isanpur in the months before the riots, which were discontinued after the riots. This increased activity of VHP, RSS and Bajrang Dal units was also noted in other parts of Gujarat, which suggests that the preparation for the violence had been under way before the burning of the train coach in Godhra.” (p. 177)

The findings of ethnographic fieldwork done by Berenschot in three urban localities in Gujarat—Maneknagar, Isanpur (which used to be a neighbourhood of textile mill labourers) and Raamrahim-nagar—between January 2005 and March 2006 got incorporated in his book, *Riot Politics: Hindu-Muslim Violence and the Indian State*. The book is a seminal account of micro politics of communal mobilisation and communal violence in Gujarat. □□□

COOPERATION AND NON-COOPERATION

Cooperatives: Dream and Reality

Sukanta Sarkar

THIS IS 2023. BUT RABINDRANATH Tagore realised the necessity and importance of cooperatives in a backward country like India a hundred years ago. Although the co-operative movement started during Rabindranath’s lifetime, it was mainly carried out by the Swadeshi activists with the encouragement and inspiration of

Gandhiji. Initially started by weaving khadi cloth on spinning wheels or charka, the cooperatives gradually started producing other cottage and rural goods as well. After the partition of the country many cooperatives were formed in different regions and especially in West Bengal, through which the rationing (Public Distribution System) scheme

was also run in rural areas. But there should be no hesitation in saying that they were not carried out with much care or tenderness either. As a result, most of these cooperatives have either collapsed or remained in a very poor condition. The fact that cooperatives can be a real poverty alleviation tool, neither socialist nor leftist intellectuals and politicians thought seriously about the movement. They never tried to convince or encourage the common people regarding the importance of cooperative economy.

Currently cooperative means a grey area before the eyes of common people. Except for a handful of cooperatives, most cooperatives have become an extremely neglected sector in the entire country, including this state. However, the Centre and many states have cooperative ministries. It goes without saying that these Ministries at the Centre and the States have failed. Because the persons in power are generally indifferent to the cooperative movement. The central government never gave any serious thought to cooperatives in their programme of eradication of poverty.

No doubt the first Prime Minister of the country, Jawaharlal Nehru, gave great importance to agricultural cooperatives because India was basically an agrarian economy. Although Nehru spoke of cooperative as one of the most important means of poverty alleviation, Nehru did not have a separate minister for cooperatives in his cabinet. Cooperatives were included in his cabinet with the Ministry of Community Development. However, some explanation of this can be found in Nehru's speeches and writings on cooperative movement at various times. In the case of cooperatives, Nehru gave more importance to common people or social enterprises than government initiatives. He wanted people to voluntarily build cooperatives by maintaining social harmony at their own request. Secondly, he wanted to emphasise on the autonomy of the cooperatives. Thirdly, that the cooperatives should work independently and above all with flexibility in the way of working. Nehru never wanted the government to control the cooperatives. Rather, the government will assist cooperatives in everything from infrastructure development to training. Nehru very clearly said, 'Cooperatives will be never run by the government. The cooperative will be

run by the members of the cooperative. The government will not interfere in any way in the working of cooperatives but will provide the necessary assistance to the cooperatives.' He did not think that cooperatives could run under government control. Besides, he also understood how difficult it is for the common people, especially the village people, to run cooperatives and assumed that the cooperatives would face many problems in the beginning. In that case, Nehru's clear statement, 'Man will learn from his own mistakes and stand on his own feet.' Nehru believed that government funding should never be given to cooperatives because then the people, i.e. the cooperatives themselves, would not take initiative and the cooperatives would be nothing and will not stand on their own feet or be independent. For one thing if the common people form a cooperative using their own resources, they will develop a spiritual and emotional relationship with it. Therefore, he did not want the co-operatives to be nationalised in any way. He felt that the autonomy of cooperatives would be hampered by government financial support and that cooperatives would not be able to get out of the confines of government.

Nehru's thinking on cooperatives seems to be the main reason for the politicians' passive attitude to cooperatives. In Nehruvian model, a rough outline of the role of the government in cooperatives was drawn up. But, surprisingly, in the post-Nehru era, his successors gradually reduced the emphasis on cooperatives significantly. It remained a secondary issue to the central government. However, it was during Nehru's tenure that states were asked to set up Cooperative Departments to assist cooperatives at the local level. That is, cooperatives are registered with the state government. This legal binding is still

in operation. There are cooperative offices in almost every state of the country. But the unfortunate thing is that almost no state government gives much importance to the cooperative department, which is easily seen when one looks at the overall cooperative scenario of the country. Today, with two or four exceptions, the country's co-operatives remain in a shambles. Due to the lack of Ministry of Cooperatives at the central level, the State Cooperative Departments did not take care of cooperatives in their own states as they did not get any financial support. Most of the states have not encouraged the common people to form cooperatives. On the contrary, various states have at different times complicated the area of formation and operation of cooperatives in the name of amendments to the Cooperative Act. Despite Nehru's wishes, the government continued to try to impose its own control over cooperative activities at the state level. As a result, on the one hand, there was no work to raise awareness about cooperatives among the common people, on the other hand, due to various complications of the cooperative law, the cooperative movement has lost momentum overall. The few cooperatives that have a bright presence in the economy do not have the participation of the country's farmers and workers. Therefore, it will not be an exaggeration to say that the workers-farmers remain deprived of the benefits of those cooperatives. It would be safe to say that some of these large co-operatives today are more corporate than co-operative in character.

The first co-operative in the country was formed in Karnataka in 1904-05, said to be the first co-operative in Asia, which was originally a co-operative credit society. Subsequently, several co-operative credit societies were formed, espe-

cially in South India and subsequently in different parts of the country. These enterprises in fact continued to function as a kind of paid money lending system to save the farmers from rural moneylenders. The number of such cooperative credit societies continued to grow before and after independence. These societies continued to expand their scope of work in cities and even in the metropolises of the country. These co-operative credit societies became popular among a section of middle-class and lower-middle-class people. Workers and officials of various government and private organisations are still associated with such cooperatives. These cooperatives provide loans to the members for various purposes i.e. buying land or house and providing family treatment or daughter's marriage at somewhat lower interest rates than banks or private financial institutions. According to a government survey, the number of such cooperative credit societies was 1 lakh 48 thousand in the financial year 2009-2010. 18 crore 12 lakh people are associated with these societies. Almost all of them are middle class and lower-middle class and most of them are employees or small businessmen. Just 10 years ago, the number of such societies

was 1 lakh 43 thousand and the number of members was 15 crore 29 lakh. The statistics shows that the number of cooperative credit societies is increasing. It should be remembered that majority of such societies are urban centric. Besides, during the same period i.e. in the financial year 2009-10, the number of non-lending primary cooperative societies was 4 lakh 58 thousand and the membership was 6 crore 82 lakh. In truth these co-operative credit societies have no role to play in wealth creation and growth. Apart from this, there are co-operative banks. It is at the state and district level. There are also several Urban Co-operative Banks, Rural Co-operative Banks in the country. Although there is an opportunity to get loans for business and trade through cooperative banks, in reality most of the cooperative banks are said to be poor. There are many reasons for that. Notable among them are unprofessionalism in planning and management, corruption and nepotism.

But the co-operative credit societies were the basis of the co-operative movement in this country. Apart from this, the presence of another type of co-operatives is noticed which is the buyers' co-operative society. Basically, these cooperatives are formed for the purpose of selling essential commodities to the general public at fair price or slightly below the market price. After independence, ration or public distribution system was also started in many places through such cooperatives, called Consumers' Cooperatives. Unfortunately, this system did not last and today the Consumers' Cooperatives known as 'Samabayika' in cities and suburbs, charge prices little below market rates. All these co-operatives do not generate wealth and people associated with them do not have the opportunity to prosper. But it is

also important to recognise that buyers' cooperatives are really needed because such cooperatives can provide some 'relief' to consumers. Also, in this era, markets such as 'co-operatives' seem to be able to counter the invasion of private segregated stores (malls) to a great extent. But, even if there are such cooperatives, their number is not enough and there is not much initiative to form new buyers or consumers cooperatives. Apart from this, one more thing that should not be overlooked in any way is the lack of skills, technology and modern management in these cooperatives.

Even after one hundred years, the co-operative thought has not made any deep impression on the so-called educated masses of the country. Therefore, it is easy to imagine that the majority of the backward people who are 90 percent farmers will have a great lack of co-operative spirit. To be honest, neither the government, nor the political organisations, nor the social organisations of the country have taken the slightest initiative to bring cooperative awareness among the agricultural and working people of the country. This explanation will not be accepted by the government. The government will present various facts and figures to refute this accusation. Even today, no one can deny that India is dependent on agro-economy. At different times, various thinkers and political leaders of the country also believe that rural India is the real India, so the country cannot become financially self-sufficient if the rural economy, i.e., the agrarian economy, is not strengthened. The rural economy in this country is mainly dependent on agriculture, cow-breeding i.e. milk production and fisheries. To what extent has the cooperative path been used in agriculture? According to the official data, 1 lakh 1 thousand

Just Published
WITH THE
PASSING TIME

by **Farooque Chowdhury**

Published by : **NGG Books**

4, Aati Bazar, Keraniganj,
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Email: nggbooks@gmail.com

Website: www.nggbooks.wordpress.com

Price: 400tk

[300tk for teachers and students,
if collected from the publisher.]

285 Primary Agricultural Cooperative Societies [PACS] have been formed since independence in the country for the development of farmers. There are more or less 13 crore farmers belonging to PACS. Currently the number of people related to agriculture in the country is about 90 crore. But only 13-14 percent of farmers are under the umbrella of co-operatives. There are 1 lakh 38 thousand 347 cooperatives focusing on cow rearing or milk production. About one and a half crore rural people are associated with these cooperatives. There are about 25 thousand fishing cooperatives in the country. About 38 to 40 lakh fishermen are associated with them. In this case it is also important to note that according to the official estimates, there are about 1.45 million fishermen in the country. Apart from these 3 sectors, there are numerous unorganised hand and cottage industries in rural India which have not been exploited by cooperatives. A few scattered handicraft cooperatives have sprung up, but actually they are by no means significant. In Eastern India, several states, including West Bengal, have developed weaving industries through cooperatives, but most of them are in a very poor condition. Primary Agricultural Credit Cooperatives and Dairy and Fishery Cooperatives provide loans to farmers for purchase of seeds, fertilisers, cattle feed, fish feed, seedlings in some cases and beyond these cooperatives any other aspect of overall livelihood of farmers, cattle breeders or fisher-folk cooperatives do not play a role. As a result, rural resource producers do not benefit as much from such co-operatives. Hence, it can be said that not only insufficient number of co-operatives are at the very marginal level in the development of rural economy, but also the main function of the co-operatives that

exist is lending. These cooperatives play almost no role in wealth creation, empowerment of the rural masses or generation of rural employment in their own work and marketing of produce.

The most important agro-based industry in the country is the sugar industry. Over 5 crore farmers are directly involved in Ankh (sugar cane) cultivation. There are about 700 sugar mills in the country. A NITI Aayog report in 2020 says that 5 lakh workers are directly involved in sugar production. In that report, it is said that family members are dependent on 5 crore Ankh farmers. In the same way, their families depend on the 5 lakh workers working in the sugar mills. That is, in a word, more than 20 crore people are involved in sugar production. A report by the National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories Limited or NFCSFL says, there were 525 cooperative sugar mills in the country in 2017-18. The report claims that 35 percent of the total sugar production in the country comes from cooperative sugar mills. Most of the cooperative sugar mills are in Maharashtra. Out of 525, only 24 cooperative sugar mills are in Uttar Pradesh. Most of the Ankh cultivation is also done in Maharashtra and it is also pertinent to note that Maharashtra has the highest number of farmers' suicides every year. A large part of them is associated with sugarcane cultivation. In most cases, many farmers commit suicide in Maharashtra due to not being able to repay their loans to the moneylenders without getting fair price for the produce. In Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh or Gujarat sugar mills have been formed through co-operatives, but no co-operatives have been formed with regard to Ankh cultivators. As a result, farmers in these states did not get any benefit of cooperatives.

But, do the workers get any benefit at all from the cooperative sugar mills that have come up in Maharashtra or neighbouring states or are they just as deprived as the sugarcane farmers. Almost all cooperative sugar mills are controlled by politically supported sugar merchants. Workers' participation in all these cooperatives is minimal and nominal. As a result, it is seen that even in this case, the cooperatives are not really protecting any interest of the farmers-labourers.

For the first time the present central government launched a Ministry of Cooperation 2 years ago, more precisely on July 6, 2021. This decision is a very important step in the *Samabay Andolon* or Cooperative Movement across the country. Even though the co-operatives were not jointly registered, the state co-operative offices were running in a directionless manner as there was no relevant ministry at the centre. Financially, the State Governments cannot allocate much to the State Cooperative department. It has also been announced by the Ministry of Cooperation that the state cooperative offices will have the opportunity to receive various project-based financial assistance as a result of the formation of the Ministry at the Centre.

This new ministry of the central government has taken several schemes to revamp the co-operatives of the country, especially the Primary Agricultural Credit Societies or PACS. The Ministry has framed a by-law for that. Until now, PACS did not do much other than giving loans to farmers for agricultural work. The model by-law calls for these PACS to be multipurpose. That is, PACS are now MPACS. Apart from lending money, these MPACSs are said to facilitate 25 business activities. From now on any PACS can do different business according to local demand.

Not only loans for cultivation, but also PACS will be able to trade fertilisers and seeds. They can also do business related to agriculture and farmer's life. For example, MPACS can take up Warehousing, LPG, Petrol, Diesel dealerships. As a result, on the one hand, farmers will get fuel for irrigation at a much lower price, on the other hand, the income of MPACS will increase and there will be an opportunity to increase rural employment. The model by-law states that women, Dalit and tribal farmer families will be given preference in providing LPG, Petrol, Diesel dealerships. The Union Ministry of Cooperation has decided to build another 2 lakh MPACS within a short period.

The Model Bye-law calls for MPACS to form a Follow-on Public Offer or FPO. The National Cooperative Development Corporation or NCDC has decided to allocate an additional 11,000 FPOs to PACs. A financial assistance of Rs 33 lakh will be given to each FPO and Rs 25 lakh will be given to each cluster-based business organisation. Apart from this, PACs will henceforth be able to engage in the business of manufacturing agricultural machinery, packaging and transportation of agricultural produce, the Model By-law said. In this way, if the business activities of PACs increase, the rural economy will improve the Union Ministry of Cooperation feels.

The Ministry of Cooperation also announced the decision to form three new National Multi State Co-operative Societies namely, National Multi State Cooperative Organic Society, National Multi State Cooperative Export Society and National Multi State Cooperative Seed Society. Ministry of Cooperation has already planned Rs10, 000 crore assistance for the Cooperative Sugar Mills. The Union Government has also announced this allocation for

Cooperative Sugar Mills (CSMs) in the budget. The Central Government has given a grant of Rs. 1,000 crore to the National Cooperative Development Corporation or NCDC under the Ministry of Cooperation and in this sector NCDC can borrow Rs 10,000 crore from the market and lend to the CSMs. That is, a total loan of Rs 10,000 crore will be given for strengthening and modernisation of CSMs. 500 Crore has been provided to CSMs in this sector in the financial year 2022-23. In this case, it has been informed that NCDC will also give money to build new cooperatives in the Sugar sector.

While these initiatives are laudable on the face of it, the question that needs to be raised is whether it can really lead to the development of the cooperative sector? There is no question of opposing the initiative to strengthen the sector by forming cooperatives in the industrial sector of the country, especially in the agro-based industry. But why the sugar industry chosen? Why can't the Central Co-operation Ministry even give a hint of any effort to revive the sector by modernising it by forming co-operatives in the case of the dilapidated iron and steel industry in the eastern region, especially in West Bengal, Assam and Bihar? Paper industry is also an agro-based industry. At one time, this industry had a huge impact on the country's economy. Even today, from jute cultivation to production of jute products, more or less 5 crore people are involved in West Bengal alone. The Ministry of Co-operatives is strangely silent on using the cooperative system to build cooperatives to save or strengthen these agro-based industries. But there is no dearth of initiative by the Ministry of Cooperation in the sugar industry to allocate huge sums of money to set up co-operatives in

this industry. Not because almost all cooperative sugar mills in Maharashtra, 90 percent or more are still controlled by Congress or NCP leaders, and as mentioned earlier, the sugar lobby plays a controlling role in Maharashtra politics.

However, it is difficult to say how much the cooperatives will grow even if a separate Ministry for Co-operation is opened at the Centre. The real thing is the cooperative movement. In all the countries of the world where the cooperative movement has been successful, regardless of whether it is socialist or capitalist, the autonomy or self-governance of cooperatives has been introduced everywhere, and in all countries where the state or government has interfered in the management of cooperatives, the cooperative movement has finally failed. Prime examples are the now-defunct Soviet Union and the socialist countries of Eastern Europe. Another major obstacle to the cooperative movement in this country is politics. No matter how much it claims on the books or in government documents that the cooperatives do not have political control, it is mostly empty. The reality is just the opposite.

If the Central or State Co-operative Ministries 'force' the law on the co-operatives, it will be counterproductive. Therefore, although the early benefits of cooperative farming were great, later cooperatives could no longer exist in the Soviet Union or the socialist countries of Eastern Europe. Because the common people of those countries had no right to make any movement, negative or positive. Thus, non-movement co-operatives also collapsed in all countries. Even so, there is hope that there is fertile ground for building cooperative movements in India.

□□□

Voices from the Underground Select Naxalite Documents 1965-71	225	The Spring Thunder & Kolkata Amit Bhattacharyya	250
Memories as History Contextualising Bengal Edited by : Pradip Chattopadhyay Aparajita Dhar, Binata Sarkar	225	Refugees & Terror Jyotirmoy Banerjee	200
Paradise Lost A Contemporary History of Kashmir 1947-2020 Siddhartha Guha Ray	500	War & Politics : Understanding Revolutionary Warfare Goutam Navlakha	225
Farewell to Welfare State: NITI Ayog, Demonitisation & GST Mohammad Irshad	200	Red and Green : Five Decades of the Indian Maoist Movement Monoranjan Mohanty	950
Critical Essays on the Dynamics of Capitalism Macroeconomic Theory & Policy Amit Bhaduri	250	Is the Torch Passing? Resistance & Revolution in China & India Robert Well	395
Gender and Naxalite Movement Ed. Pradip Basu	600	Understanding Maoists : Notes of Participant Observer from Andhra Pradesh N. Venugopal	375
Civil Liberties Movement In India: From Colonial Times to the Present Nilanjan Dutta	700	Red Star over India : As the Wretched of the Earth are rising Jan Myrdal	295
Naxalite Politics: Post-Structuralism, Post-Colonialist and Subaltern Perspectives Ed. Pradip Basu	550	Young People and Climate Change : Communication and Responses Matthew Hibberd	500
War and Peace in Junglemahal : People State and Maoist Ed. Biswajit Roy	600	CAA : An Assault on Fundamental Rights Nazrul Islam	250
Human Rights in India (Historical Perspectives) Ed. Amit Bhattacharyya & Bimal Kanti Ghosh	550	আর এস এস একটি প্রাথমিক পরিচয় : রাষ্ট্রীয় স্বয়ংসেবক সংঘের দেশ ও মানবতা বিরোধী দলিলের ভিত্তিতে রচিত শামসুল ইসলাম	৬০
The Revolution and the French Establishments in India (1790-93) Ed. Arghya Bose	750	India's Myanmar Maneuvers forthcoming Tuhina Sarkar	
		My Naxal Days And After forthcoming Kallol	
		Urbanising Calcutta forthcoming Nikhil Sur	



**SETU
PRAKASHANI**

Sale Counter : 2 Shyamacharan Dey Street, Kol-73
Office : 12A Shankar Ghosh Lane, Kol-6

Phone : 9433074548/22190704
Online purchase : setuprakashani.com
e-mail : setuprakashani@gmail.com

BITTER REALITY

World Lacks Any Credible Institutional Capacity to Deal with Climate Change

Vinod Mubayi

THE PAINFUL TRUTH THAT emerges from the recent series of extreme weather events around the world as well as energy sector developments in the major countries, including China, the US, and India, is that the world lacks any meaningful institutional framework or ability to deal with the major factor influencing climate change, viz. the greenhouse gas emissions caused by fossil fuel use. Yes, there is the Conference of Parties, COP, sponsored by the United Nations, consisting of representatives from all countries that meets every year in different locations where leaders of each country make pronouncements and promises to curb their national carbon emissions, and agree on policies to limit global temperature rise and adapt to climate change. The next meeting, COP 28, will be held towards the end of 2023 in the oil and gas producing Gulf area of Dubai, UAE. Ironically, the president of this conference will be an oil man Sultan Jaber who heads Dubai's Ministry of Energy. So far, over the several decades these UN meetings have been taking place, carbon emissions and global temperatures have kept rising. The decision-makers in industry and the banking system who fund major extractive projects and also grease the wheels of the political system seem to have a restricted vision: a vision limited by the horizon of their profit margins. Naturally, one cannot blame them individually for continuing to provide billions to oil and gas companies to explore, drill and produce, after all

they have a so-called fiduciary responsibility to maximise the financial returns to their shareholders. They are part of an overall capitalist system where production of any commodity is premised on profitability. At the present time, the profitability of oil and gas production is very high so it is no surprise that it is surging and no political leader in the major oil producing countries wants to curb oil and gas production, or, in China and India coal production, despite the proven danger carbon emissions pose to the planet. At the same time, in the US, the country that has historically been by far the largest consumer of fossil fuels and thus the largest source of GHG emissions, one of the major political parties whose candidate may well win next year's presidential election has just released a report pledging to increase and accelerate the production of oil, gas, and coal. Such a development, if it comes to pass, may well rank as a stunning example of a crime against humanity; unfortunately, the planet lacks any conceivable jurisdiction where such a crime could be prosecuted.

Alongside the continuing use of fossil fuel and GHG emissions, there is news about the rapid and accelerating deployment of non-fossil sources of energy, in the electric power production sector, in transport vehicles, and in energy use in buildings. Due to the steep fall in the prices of solar photovoltaic panels, wind turbines, and batteries there is a rapid increase in the production of utility-scale electric power from solar and

wind sources; there is also a rapid growth of all-electric automobiles, and there are plans in place for the future replacement of natural gas in the buildings sector by electricity. The financial incentives provided by the legislation sponsored by the Biden administration are credited with significantly accelerating this transition in the US; to a lesser or greater extent similar progress in renewable energy is occurring in other countries also. Despite these positive developments, the key question remains however: can the amount of GHG emissions be reduced on a time scale such that the rise in average global temperature is restricted to 1.5 degrees Celsius, the amount set by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the international body of scientists studying climate change, to keep the world's weather within safe limits? An answer to this question must consider the fact that world oil consumption according to data from the International Energy Agency (IEA) is currently approaching a record level of 103 million barrels per day (mbpd). Furthermore, the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) projects that this amount will increase by another 2.4 mbpd next year.

To get an approximate idea of how far the world is from any meaningful handle on the problem of climate change it is useful to briefly review the publicly available plans of oil, gas, and coal production in the three largest carbon emitting countries: China, #1, US, #2, and India #3.

CHINA

China is the world's single largest emitter of energy related greenhouse gases amounting to almost a third of world output, more than the US, Japan and Europe combined. The reason is that China produces and consumes more coal than the rest of the world combined. China is

also building more than a hundred coal-based power plants that will continue to spew the GHG carbon dioxide into the atmosphere when operational. However, China presents an interesting paradox as it is also the world's leader by a significant margin in solar and wind power with an installed solar power capacity, for example, almost four times greater and a wind capacity approximately three times larger compared to that of the US. So, while China can claim that it will reduce carbon emissions through the solar and wind installations, it is unclear if the additional coal power capacity will offset that reduction.

UNITED STATES

The US is now the world's largest oil and gas producer if shale oil and gas produced by hydrofracking is included and is very likely to retain that position for the foreseeable future. Although a large amount of media commentary has highlighted the Biden Administration's "historic" climate legislation passed last year that has provided hundreds of billions of dollars to the renewable energy industry, the hard fact remains that oil and gas production in the US is set to grow even as coal production goes down. Besides the huge \$8 billion Willow oil project on Alaska's North Slope, there are many more oil and gas projects that have been or are in the process of being approved. While Biden campaigned on a pledge of banning oil and gas leases on federal lands, his administration recently unveiled a new regulatory framework that permits new leases but significantly increases the low, outdated fees of an earlier era that were charged to the bidding companies. Environmental groups strongly slammed this proposal saying: "Any rule that fails to phase out oil and gas production on public lands will sacrifice human lives, ecosystems, and entire species

at the altar of fossil fuel corporations and their insatiable quest for profit." This opposition, however, is unlikely to have much impact on actual production. Meanwhile, the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank that develops policy and strategy for the Republican Party, has unveiled a plan to eliminate most current clean energy programmes to eliminate GHG carbon emissions as well as boost fossil fuel production if a Republican Administration takes power in 2025. Knowing what people already do about the science underlying climate change, the plan's call for dismantling regulations aimed at reducing carbon emissions, couched in the familiar ideological language of "let the market decide," appears almost comically designed to promote *Ignorance* as a national policy. It would indeed be risible were its consequences not so dire for life on this planet.

INDIA

India, like China, is set to increase its coal production quite significantly over the next year from about 730 million tons in the 2022-23 fiscal year to around 1 billion tons in the next year. Coal accounts for almost three quarters of India's electricity production and this is not expected to change much in the next few years despite the optimistic claims of the Indian government or the projections of the International Energy Agency. India also imports over 160 million tons of coal over half from Indonesia and lesser amounts from Australia, Russia and South Africa. India has reopened old mines and is destroying virgin old-growth forests in developing environmentally destructive open-cast surface or strip coal mines. In a new development under the current regime, India is privatising part of its coal production by providing long-term contracts to private mining compa-

nies, including the Modi government's favourite crony, Adani, whose enterprises now account for a large share of India's infrastructure of ports, airports, power plants and coal mines. At the 2021 Glasgow COP meeting, India, along with China, lobbied hard for the language "phase-out of coal" to be replaced by the milder "phase-down of coal" which in reality didn't mean that either country would use less coal in absolute terms, only as a relative fraction of its projected energy consumption. Although at the COP 27 meeting last year in Egypt, India claimed that fossil fuels would only account for half or less of its electricity production by 2030, recent newspaper reports suggest that renewable energy production is not meeting targets and that dependence on coal will continue.

Other countries

Most countries in Western Europe had phased out the use of coal for electric power some years ago but the conflict in Ukraine followed by the suspension of supply of Russian natural gas has changed the situation. Germany restarted some mothballed coal power plants and postponed the closure of some operational ones. Some other countries such as France, Austria and Italy have also reactivated old coal power plants. While this re-emergence of coal in Europe is claimed to be temporary, it will delay plans to reduce carbon emissions. Japan consumes around 200 million tons of coal annually in the power and other industrial sectors. The tsunami-caused accident at the Fukushima nuclear power plant in 2011 that led to the closure of much of Japan's nuclear plants means that coal and liquefied natural gas will continue to provide much of Japan's power although the share of renewables is expected to increase.

Role of the Major Banking Institutions

The major banks provide the vital financial requirements of the entire fossil fuel industry and profit handsomely from doing so. They are thus as culpable as the oil, gas, and coal companies for the carbon emissions causing climate change. The amounts of money involved are immense by any reckoning and demonstrate why, among other reasons, it is so difficult to curb let alone halt fossil fuel production. From 2016 to 2022, the top 60 banks provided \$5.5 trillion to fossil fuel companies; fully one quarter of this amount, around \$1.4 trillion, was provided by just 4 big US banks: JP Morgan Chase, Citi, Wells Fargo and Bank of America. Despite paying occasional lip service to climate issues, the tycoons of the banking system appear to be squarely behind their fossil fuel investments. The example of Jaime Dimon, head of JP Morgan Chase, the biggest bank in the fossil fuel business, is instructive. In an article in Yahoo finance from August 2022 he is quoted as telling a gaggle of rich clients: "Why can't we get it through our thick skulls" that America should "boost more oil and gas?". An article in Bloomberg news quoted him telling the US Congress in September 2022 that the US needed to invest in more fossil fuels and he is also reported as saying if his banks stopped funding new fossil fuel products it would "be the road to hell for America". Since the investments in the exploration, development and production of oil and gas for example are long-term investments extending over several decades, stopping fossil fuel production within a time frame dictated by global temperature rise of 1.5 degrees Celsius appears highly unlikely absent some extraordinary actions aimed at uprooting the global financial system.

Climate and Weather

The surface ocean temperature near the Florida Keys reached an unprecedented 38.5 degree Celsius (over 101 degrees Fahrenheit) in early August this year in what is very likely a global record as ocean heat ascends into hitherto uncharted territory. Other extreme weather events all over the globe have been occurring regularly and have been highlighted in the media. What is particularly concerning is that the existing infrastructure standards are based on data that is now being outpaced by climate change as stated in a new study. So, in the US for example, "once in a hundred years" rain events now occur at 20-year intervals, on average, and that interval will keep shrinking as long as fossil fuel consumption continues unchecked. In 2018, the IPCC released a special report on the impact of global warming when temperature reaches 1.5 degree Celsius above baseline and documented the destruction of ecosystems and irreversible changes that would occur if global temperatures reached or exceeded 2 degrees Celsius. It was estimated in the report that anthropogenic activities that had already caused 1 degree Celsius of global warming, were likely to cause a 1.5 degrees Celsius rise between 2030 and 2052 at the then current rate of carbon emission. This estimate now appears too optimistic based on the latest data and analysis.

Conclusion

The analysis presented in a very recent paper "Global Warming in the Pipeline" by the noted climate scientist James Hansen and his collaborators is worth quoting at length:

Under the current geopolitical approach to GHG emissions, global warming will likely pierce the 1.5°C ceiling in the 2020s and 2°C before 2050. Impacts on people and nature will accelerate

as global warming pumps up hydrologic extremes. The enormity of consequences demands a return to Holocene-level global temperature. Required actions include: 1) a global increasing price on GHG emissions, 2) East-West cooperation in a way that accommodates developing world needs, and 3) intervention with Earth's radiation imbalance to phase down today's massive human-made "geo-transformation" of Earth's climate. These changes will not happen with the current geopolitical approach, but current political crises present an opportunity for reset, especially if young people can grasp their situation.

Thus, the danger caused by climate's delayed response and the need for anticipatory action to alter the course of fossil fuel development was apparent to scientists and the fossil fuel industry 40 years ago. Yet industry chose to long deny the need to change energy course, and now, while governments and financial interests connive, most industry adopts a "greenwash" approach that threatens to lock in perilous consequences for humanity. Scientists will share responsibility, if we allow governments to rely on goals for future global GHG levels, as if targets had meaning in the absence of policies required to achieve them.

This analysis indicates clearly that as long as fossil fuel consumption is permitted to proceed undisturbed, the so-called Nationally Determined Goals (NDG), targets for carbon reduction, presented by each country at the various COP meetings lack "meaning" as no credible policies to achieve them are presented. The world is hence confronted with a dire future in the absence of any global institutional capacity to cut carbon emissions. □□□

BLACK MONEY TALKS

Parallel Economy Continues to Flourish

Manas Bakshi

NEARLY ONE YEAR BACK, a news item that initially created a stir on 17th June 2022 was about a significant jump in funds stashed in Swiss banks by Indian individuals and firms. It included, according to the annual data revealed by Switzerland's Central bank on 16th June, 22, funds from India-based corporate branches and financial institutions. The amount jumped to 14-year high of 3.83 billion Swiss francs in 2021 from 2.55 billion at the end of 2020. The upward trend in the aggregate funds of the Indian clients with the Swiss banks is in proof of the second consecutive year of surge as far as 'holdings via securities and similar instruments' along with customer deposits are concerned.

Notably, these are official figures reported by banks to the Swiss National Bank "and do not indicate the Quantum of the much debated, alleged black money held by Indians in Switzerland. These figures also do not include the money that Indians, NRIs or others might have in Swiss banks in the names of third country entities".

While the initial stir has subsided, what may be recalled is the renewed election pledge of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2019, and that is nothing but the issue of recovery of black money [Kala Dhan]. As early as in 2016, while showering plaudits on the success of the Income Declaration Scheme 2016, with the assertion that "In the history of independent India, no government has been able to recover black money to such an extent", Mr Amit Shah claimed that apart from Rs 65,250 crore money

disclosed under the said scheme, "The government had recovered Rs 56,378 crore undisclosed earnings in income tax department's search and survey drive and seized Rs 1986 crore cash." By this time, enough water has flowed down the river Ganges and black money accumulation has not stopped for a moment.

And there is hardly any reason for the common people of India to be jubilant at the "unprecedented victory of Modi government over black money" because the menacingly surging black money power capable of goading a parallel economy has been threatening the Indian polity since long. Before coming to power in 2014 while BJP was preparing the ground for a nationwide campaign, it had in its manifesto the promise to ferret out black money from the hidden coffers of the black marketeers, hoarders and the like besides providing jobs to crores of youngsters, controlling price hike and punishing criminal offences and so on. What people see in reality is a different picture hardly subscribing to the loud talks—whatsoever—that were floated in the air. The promise of the recovered amount to be distributed among the poor and the have-nots has not yet borne fruit. Instead, the economic offenders blessed with a safe recluse abroad have escaped the dragnet.

In fact, plunder of public money in more ways than one has come under scanner in some states more piquantly in the recent times than ever before. Investigation reveals such money has been invested in opening bank accounts in fictitious names and utilised in real estate business, mushrooming of lottery

shops, restaurants, fake organisations and film industry. While formerly, hawala transactions were the main source of amassing black money, now the spectrum is wide enough for flow of black money. Now the networks are stretching beyond the country—the alleged connection of a Bengal-based politician with a Russian model in a recent scam of over Rs 100 crore is one for instance. It largely emanates from bribe of lacs of Rupees offered by unworthy and/or non-eligible candidates to get jobs through back door; though such appointments at various levels—from School to Corporation—have later been proved illegal, and the matter is sub-judice, there are undeniably several other ways and openings for influx of black money. Together with this, as alleged, misappropriation of fund meant for public utility services—from 100 days work to PM Abas Joyona—has also fattened the pockets of some political leaders.

The allegation and counter-allegation of political vendetta between centre and state to malign the image of one by the other may continue but money earned through smuggling of cow, sand, coal and stone is now an open secret. The inverted pyramid of such unaccounted money remains in the dark until and unless it is duly investigated and made public. But the way to escape is also there. And that is nothing but by way of changing political colour to avert investigation.

Hence, nothing pragmatically correctional is likely to emanate following the implementation of a slew of apparently punitive measures against the economic offenders—at state or national level—so long as defection floundering all democratic rules and norms is possible and permissible. It may be pertinent to recall in this context the news

flash which some regional TV channels displayed some time back. It is definitely alarming but no rare sight; and it is with regard to those who have enough black money to fly away 2000 Rupee notes from their house-top after winning an election or on the occasion of marriage or some other festivals while millions are scrambling for a morsel of food—even a drop of potable water—in remote rural areas of the country.

Such a phenomenon is particularly in evidence where even 100 days work is not ensured to the poor—allegedly due to non-submission of utilisation certificates, malpractices in job allocation and discrepancies in Master Roll. The plight of the migrant labourers from various states including West Bengal during lockdown and after beggars description. Its after effect is still in evidence in the drought-stricken arid areas and flood-prone riparian parts of the country. It is against this backdrop that the unbridled—rather bulging—power and strength of black money wielders is in question. And now, the point for consideration is—since high value denomination of Rs. 2000 are not used in large measure for carrying out regular transactions by ordinary people and it is an easy tool for stashing black money for hoarding—will its withdrawal be a step in the right direction?

For Frontier Contact

D.K. AGENCIES (P) LTD.

Booksellers, Publishers & Subscription
Agents since 1968

CIN: U74899DL1983PTC017169

"DK" is a registered trademark
Regd. off: A/15-17, D.K. Avenue,
Mohan Garden, Najafgarh Road,
New Delhi-110059. INDIA

Metro Station: Nawada (Blue Line)

Web: <http://www.dkagencies.com>

Ph: (011) 25357104, 25357105

Fax: (+91-11) 25357103

The decision of RBI on May 19, 2023 to withdraw Rs 2000/ denomination notes 'as a part of currency management' is a welcome effort as the withdrawal of Rs 2000 notes comprising '10.8 per cent of the currency in circulation' will cast 'very marginal impact on the economy'. More so because, these are not 'commonly used in any transactions'. But much of the huge amount (crores and crores) of black money seized very recently by ED and IT Department from the hidden coffers of some of the economic offenders and their cohorts wielding political power are of Rs 2000 denomination. Not only that, it is estimated that 80 percent of Rs 2000/ denomination notes are in store of the fraudsters. On several occasions, criminals generating fake currency of high value—apt to vitiate the financial system—have been intercepted. On the one hand, it has helped accentuate the spread of black money to jeopardise proper functioning of the financial system causing price hike and economic disparity in the main and instigate with money power terrorist activities inside the country, on the other.

While the "Reserve Bank of India estimates that most of the Rs 3.6 lakh crore of high-value Rs 2000 notes will be turned in over the next four months", Rs 2000 notes will remain a legal tender though the deadline for swapping or depositing such high value notes is September 30. It is a platitude to say that Rs 2000 denomination notes as medium of exchange are not commonly used by poor and middle class people; so there was less rush at bank counters but, at the same time, traders were largely "wary of accepting Rs 2000/ notes, citing a lack of clarity about deposit and exchange facilities at banks as they see a rise in customers wanting to pay for goods with the highest de-

nomination currency which is being withdrawn".

But the problem lies elsewhere. Since the banks were instructed "not to insist on proof of identity, branch officials were unsure of the procedure to be followed as their internal risk management process required them to do so", and there was hardly any scope for scrutiny on 'transacting black money'. As observed by the governor of RBI—"the RBI does not do any scrutiny. It is (by) other agencies like income tax (department)... and others will follow their normal procedure like (that) for Rs 50,000 and above... banks have their own reporting systems like CTR, STR (cash transaction report, suspicious transaction report)."

And this is what paved the way overnight for immediate conversion of black money into gold; it created Pavlovian response leading to a "remarkable rush to buy gold" because almost everyone agreed that 'visit to the bank was a bad idea'. The withdrawal of Rs 2000 note triggered such panic buying that jewellers witnessed a steady flow of customers buying yellow metal with Rs 2000 notes, so much so that in Kolkata "a customer at a leading jewellery chain booked gold bangles for over Rs 5 lakh and paid in cash—in Rs 2000 notes". While the pink note created havoc, jewellers too demanded a higher price for gold if it involved significant exchange of Rs 2000 notes.

It can be easily inferred from the above analysis that high denomination notes can easily be diverted to hoarding of gold and investment in real estate business. Considering the threat of black money and fake currency in use a formidable factor as far as spate of black money is concerned, central Government opted for cancellation of Rs 1000 and Rs 500 denomination notes in

2016. But demonetisation at that time or afterwards had cast no magic spell to check spread of black money power except causing enormous harassment to the common people of the country—even reaching the extent of death in some places.

Now, it is crystal clear that in the context of setting a bulwark to black money, withdrawal of Rs 2000 notes bears no indication of the economy returning to the path of

rectitude—for it portends no effective measure to track the source of huge income; to be more specific, how and wherefrom a huge amount of Rs 2000 notes were generated. Fact is black or unaccounted money has two sources: First, illegal activities—bribe, crime and corruption. Secondly, undisclosed income from various sources—legal or illegal. Even if the source is detected, government initiative to tackle the issue has so far remained confined to lukewarm

schemes like Voluntary Disclosure Schemes and demonetisation.

But both the schemes have so far been found to have cast scant effect on recovery of black money. Unless it is detected at the source of generation, with provisions for exemplary punishment as preventive measures, and expenditure tax is imposed forthwith specially in case of investment in gold, real estate business and the like, there is no way to redress from the cankerous malady. □□□

GAUCHAR RAZA

A Poet against Fascism

A C

POET GAUCHAR RAZA wrote in his twitter on August 18, 2021:

'I was born in Allahabad, it doesn't exist, was brought up in Aligarh soon it will vanish. In other words, I was never born and I will never be brought up. Two institutes (NISTADS & NISCAIR) where I served don't exist so I was never employed. Tragedy has hit many, I am not alone'.

He sees his birth place Allahabad does not exist now; even Aligarh where he was brought up will soon be vanished. He feels he was never born and brought up. Tragedy, he says, has hit many people of India besides him and yet he feels he is not alone. A day before he wrote:

'Shocked to know that Allahabad University cancelled Mushaira/Kavi Sammelan at the last moment because Chief Minister's office did not like some poets. It is a city where poets like Raghupati Sahay could criticise Nehru (PM) in his presence'.

As the office of the Chief Minister didn't like some poets, the Mushaira or the poets' conference had been cancelled by the authority of the

Allahabad University at the last moment! He reminded that Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru didn't disapprove criticism launched from the poets against him even in his presence. And the renowned poet Raghupati Sahay did it openly. He was not disliked or punished by Nehru.

Intolerance has now got its height in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) regime where no sorts of criticism against the government or the political party in power or any leader of the party can be endured.

Raza, an Indian scientist and an Urdu poet, social activist and documentary film-maker, was born on August 17, 1956 at Aligarh. He was well-known to the public for his films like *Jung-e-Azadi* on India's First War of Independence of 1857 and *Inqilab* (2008) on Bhagat Singh.

Wizarat Husain was his father who was a freedom fighter and a communist party member. He was a renowned educationist and science teacher and taught in the Aligarh Muslim University and his mother, a social worker, was intensely involved in freedom struggle. Raza was graduated in engineering from the Aligarh Muslim University

in 1977 and did his MTech from Delhi in 1979. During his student life in the Aligarh Muslim University he was attached to the student front of the CPI(M) and during emergency in 1975 he was the secretary of the SFI of Western Uttar Pradesh.

During the JNU episode in 2016, *Zee News*, acting predominantly as a mouthpiece of BJP, aired many a fake news and doctored video to brand some students as *anti-national*. On March 9 the renowned Urdu poet and scientist Gauhar Raza got in the raze of BJP. Only four days before he attended the 51st Shankar-Shad Mushaira—a prestigious platform for Urdu poets of India and Pakistan and recited his poems. He was branded by this channel as a member of *Afzal premi gang* and therefore obviously a '*desh drohi*' or *anti-national*. Even this channel's reporter alleged that Raza had made a documentary on the Gujarat riots as if it was a crime to make such a documentary on Gujarat riots as the then Gujarat government led by Narendra Modi was involved in this act of brutality. Indeed, Raza made such a documentary on Gujarat riots in 2002. On his work he said in an interview:

'My documentary was not a technically sound one but was the first on the Gujarat riots. It was attacked and banned from

screening in some places but the media always supported it. When media starts opposing you, you don't know whom to go to even if you are right. So it is very important to have not just a free and fair media but also a responsible media'.

Such a brief presentation on the life and activities of Raza is placed to get a short idea of him and the world of this thought. He said:

'If in a country, the artists-painters, actors, poets, writers and many more warn you about the dangers that look ahead, they should be taken seriously. Voices are being suppressed across the country. It's time now to vote against hatred spewing leaders'.

When such an alarm is ringing at the door, the demand of the poets and the intellectuals of Bengal to get united with their performance to face fascism led by BJP-RSS combine is a must. They should take to the streets in protest against the said merchant of disdain and malice.

Despite march of 'iron heels' no anti-fascist outcry by the activists of cultural front. Where have gone the days of vehement protests in Bengal? Where have gone the descendants of those artists-writers-poets and intellectuals who standing against the anti-people role of the government openly created a history? Kolkata no longer has the distinction of being called a city of marches and rallies!

The man who in the forties of the twentieth century organised successfully almost all the writers-poets-artists and intellectuals of the time and got them actively involved in open protest on the streets and organised a culture of protest and resistance, was PC Joshi, the leader of the then CPI. His political line may draw many a flaw, but he instigated an unforeseen struggle against fascism in the cultural arena.

Far from the participacy, he organised an active platform to launch a cultural protest movement against fascism though his efforts did not last long. Participats did their best to disarm this platform and created a mess of disorder. And later, during the Ranadive period, the worst had been done. For this act of disorder the participats did never repent, rather remained busy at branding even the loyal and dedicated party-intellectuals with dissenting voice 'trotskites'.

During the last decade of seventies, when the blood-hunters were at large on the open streets along with the police and the ruling party leaders, when a deep darkness of terrorism on the part of the government itself was on the move over the nation, at least one poet and an editor cum journalist were seen to come to the fore to create an epic of protests. They did pay a deep hearing to this ruling class terrorism. They were not armed with rifles. But they turned their pens into fiery weapons to combat inhuman atrocities. Of them the poet was Birendra Chattopadhyay and other Samar Sen, the editor of 'Frontier'. To quote Shakespeare there was 'black days' prevailing on the land. The state police and ruling class-paid hooligans were elated to wipe out the Naxals and the time got bloodened. In such a time on August 4 (at night) the police of the then notorious Chief Minister of West Bengal dragged the Poet-Journalist and Political leader Saroj Dutta and beheaded him in the Maidan at the dawn (August 5) so that he could not be identified. Poet Birendra instantly protested against such a heinous crime of the police and Samar Sen was unhesitant to pen against fascist activities of the state.

Days after, people found Poet Kamallesh Sen to organise protests of the cultural workers along with fellow poets, writers, artists, intellec-

tuals to assemble on the street against the anti-people role of the ruling class in power. Then people got poet Sankha Ghosh to follow the path initiated by the poet Birendra. Though the language of his protest was more polished and sublime than that of the language of open conflict, yet it did much to serve the purpose and hundreds of poets-artists-writers and intellectuals along with cultural activists came down on the streets to voice their protest against anti-people role of the ruling regime. Today there is none. The vacuum expands with every passing day, goes up by degrees. Where have gone those writer-intellectuals ejaculating fiery slogans on the streets once?

Now the hindutwabadi fascist forces led by the BJP-RSS combine are continually seeding hatred and dividing the people of the country by caste, creed and religion. The voices of protest are being suppressed by the colonial era rules and acts. They have had their free entry into the realms of constitution, judiciary and the legislature while establishing their absolute hegemony over the systems. Cultural activists are being attacked and put into the police custody or jail custody without trial for years. West Bengal is no exception.

Tragically enough, the left-wingers too are being dissociated and unorganised to launch protest on the streets. Some of them are hesitant to give due importance to the fascist onslaught of the establishment and as such stage no organised mass mobilisation. A conception has cropped up in the official left circle that through the election this authoritarian regime of the BJP can be replaced, and thus they essentially deny the necessity of combating the fascist gangs. They perhaps forget that the fascist forces cannot be fought through election-

eering politics sans battle on the open streets.

Coming back to Raza, he had to face the Hindutwabadi fascists many a time. He wrote a poem in 1994 in memory of the martyrs of Jallianwalabagh massacre in Punjab which happened in 1919 causing 381 killed out of which 222 were Hindus, 96 Sikhs and 63 Muslims. Such a heart-breaking incident encouraged him to write a poem on it after seventy-five years of the massacre. Poet Gauhar Raja did not compromise a bit and as such he was defamed and branded being a member of Afzal premi gang which was evident with his reciting a poem in the Shankar-Shad Mushaira. Raza

declined the accusation and said in an interview:

‘There is no reference to Afzal or terrorism in that poem. Whoever has followed my work knows that my poetry is always against violence and terrorism, against jihadis. I have written poems against killings by jihadis in Afghanistan. In 2010, I wrote a poem on two journalists killed in Afghanistan. I have written verses against Punjab terrorism’.

He went a step further more and said that *Zee News* episode did the worst and triggered threatening him ‘through phone calls and email.’ He had been called a jihadi, a threat to mankind, a threat to the country. Even the

channel kept showing his photograph so that he could have been identified easily and he might be attacked anytime and anywhere. He then could not move freely and was frightened that the faceless enemy had been following him all the time. He felt himself insecure and helpless and failed to understand how to get careful. But more than four hundred people across the vast field of work (comprising actors, painters, filmmakers, singers, lawyers and activists) stood by him and demanded not only apology from the channel but also appealed to the Centre and Delhi Government to initiate criminal proceedings against the said channel for putting a citizen’s ‘life under threat’. □□□

WHO NEEDS UCC?

Why Not Uniform Economic Code?

Ranganayakamma

YOU TELL ME, IF IN THE same family there is one law for one member and another law for a second member, will that household be able to function?’ asked Prime Minister Modi while addressing his party workers. This news has become a point of discussion for the past several weeks! In his speech to the party workers, Modi stressed the importance of implementing a ‘Uniform Civil Code’ to make people of all religions in the country as uniform citizens. One may infer that Modi gave this sermon keeping in view the assembly elections soon to be held in five states. This is an attempt to rally the Hindu voters behind the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) since they are aware of not getting votes of Muslims. Some opposition parties are rightfully criticising that Modi’s tactic is aimed at not considering the people of the country as citizens but to divide them into Hindus and Muslims.

Before discussing the good and bad sides of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC), one must first know the basic information about it. Indeed, a uniform law (code) is necessary to govern the personal and familial lives of citizens, belonging to not a single country but the entire world, irrespective of the differences in gender, region, religion, and caste! For example, in one or two specific religions, one male can marry multiple females! In a different religion, getting a divorce is difficult and even impossible not only for women but also for men! In all religions, property rights are different for men and women! The status of the woman is low in a man’s view! Likewise, the status of the man is high in the view of woman! Thus, in many aspects, such as marriage, divorce, adoption, and property rights, the customs and rules of different religions are different! Why? Why do those who preach religious and caste equalities in India not

touch upon the income differences that form the source of livelihood?

The constitution of India mentions the need for ‘Uniform Civil Code’. It, however, does not speak about the proper conditions required to achieve it! On the one hand, the constitution recognises the right of the citizens to practice the customs of their respective religions. And on the other hand, the constitution suggests that all citizens should have the same code governing their personal and domestic lives, irrespective of religious differences! How canny is the constitution! One is a ‘fundamental’ right, and the other one is simply a ‘suggestion’! Suggestion can never become a Law! Until now, the Uniform Civil Code remained a suggestion; the present attempts are to make it a Law.

The BJP workers must have logically questioned Modi as follows, ‘Sir! You insist that all citizens must have the same law in the name of Uniform Civil Code. This code, however, relates only to personal and family life, doesn’t it? But all citizens are not placed in the same economic situation! ‘Economic situation’ does not mean having currency notes. It

implies performing labours and involving in the production related activities. Some citizens possess huge properties, whereas others have nothing except drudgery. How much land is available in the country? Is this land a common property of all citizens? Are the citizens, who produce heaps of products in the industries equal? Who are responsible for making and operating all kinds of means of transport and secure heaps of crores and crores of money? And who own these means of transport? What are the bases for the property rights? On what properties do the sanitary workers belonging to the bottommost castes that clean the latrines, have ownership? Do the workers of the country, who toil 24 hours in production activities, have comforts in common? Do males uniformly participate in performing domestic chores, such as raising children and caring for the elderly? The working people are divided into intellectual and manual workers. When the tasks performed by the citizens are not of the same kind, can the citizens be equal?

Having grasped clearly the economic inequalities, what question must people pose to leaders like Modi? Is there uniformity between those citizens who toil day and night

in various kinds of labour, namely agriculture, industry and transportation and those who do not perform any of one of those labours? Without raising such a question, should one think of a uniform code in the matters of marriage, divorce, adoption, or some such issues? Why do you deliver great sermons on Uniform Civil Code, Great Sire, when the rights are not uniform and equal? Can't the citizens of this country question Modi like this? Such questions do not occur to those people who are flooded with euphoria for elections and those drowned in the personality cult of their leaders.

When would a Uniform Civil Code be possible? Only when there exists a 'Uniform Economic Code!' Uniform Economic Code implies a code that makes lands, mines, forests, industries, and means of transport, which form the basis of human existence as common property of the citizens. In other words, as the 'socialised property'. A law that insists on such common property is the Uniform Economic Code! The Uniform Economic Code is a system which insists that all men and women, except children, the elderly, and the sick, take an active and responsible role in the production

activities of different values! Only such a system will lead to a Uniform Civil Code!

Where a state fosters exploitation of labour, irrational religious customs dictate lives! As long as the caste system, a product of unequal division of labour, exists, the caste traditions and customs subdue the citizens of all castes. In a society where utter poverty is pervasive and a collective economic system is lacking, 'professions such as the selling and buying of women as objects of enjoyment emerge and prevail. Will the religion, caste, or professions like prostitution disappear due to Uniform Civil Code? True, reforms in the existing inequalities will give some solace. However, in a society where radical and fundamental changes are urgently needed, will piecemeal reforms sustain?

Those opposing the Uniform Civil Code are betraying the Muslim daughters and the backward 'Pasmanda,' Muslim castes, moaned the kind heart of the prime minister! Is it not a betrayal of Muslim daughters to release the criminals who sexually assaulted Bilkis Bano and other Muslim women? □□□

[Originally published in 'Sakshi', a Telugu daily. Translation: R Udaykumar]

SECTION 124A

Sedition Law—a British Legacy

I M Sharma

IN THE COLONIAL PERIOD one of the most hated provisions of law was the section 124-A IPC. But no concerted agitation was conducted to secure its repeal. Perhaps, in the wake of more and more severe repressive laws being ever made by the British imperialists to suppress the popular movements for liberation, the wrath against section 124-A would have

naturally receded to the backseats with the furore against more repressive laws charging all the energies and endeavours of the nationalists. At least after independence the democratic and socialist sections ought to have launched agitations for repeal of this section as also other repressive colonial legacies like the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1932—all of which have been blessed

by the wand of Article 372 but unfortunately that did not happen either.

The Sedition Law came into full force in 1870. In 1973 under Indira Gandhi government, it became a cognisable offence. Several social activists and journalists have accused of sedition for making certain remarks. Between 2014 and 2019, 326 sedition cases were registered in the country. Charge sheets were filed in 141 cases but only 6 people were convicted.

Section 124A, according to the website Indiankanoon.org states,

Books by
RANGANAYAKAMMA
FROM A MARXIST PERSPECTIVE

ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS:

- 1) **AN INTRODUCTION TO MARX'S 'CAPITAL'** (in 3 volumes). This book is out of print. [But its E-version is available at a much lower price in Google playbooks as well as Amazon kindle books.]
- 2) **HOUSEHOLD WORK AND OUTSIDE WORK.** Pages: 192. 1/8th demy size. Paper back. Price: Rs. 60.
- 3) **FOR THE SOLUTION OF THE 'CASTE' QUESTION, BUDDHA IS NOT ENOUGH, AMBEDKAR IS NOT ENOUGH EITHER, MARX IS A MUST.** Pages: 456. 1/8th demy size. Price: Rs. 100.
- 4) **RAMAYANA THE POISONOUS TREE.** Pages: 784. Hard bound. Royal demy size. Price: Rs. 150.
- 5) **CASTE AND CLASS: A MARXIST VIEWPOINT.** Pages: 140. Paper back. 1/8th demy size. Price: Rs. 60.
- 6) **ECONOMICS FOR CHILDREN: [Lessons based on Marx's 'Capital'].** Pages: 472. Hardbound. Royal demy size. Price: Rs.150.
- 7) **PHILOSOPHY. A Short Introduction.** Pages: 320. Paper back. Royal demy size. Price: Rs.100.

HINDI TRANSLATIONS:

1. जाती प्रश्न केलिये बुद्ध काफी नहीं, अम्बेडकर भी काफी नहीं, मार्क्स जरूरी है . (.)कपीयें नहीं है. इस किताब चौध्रा प्रिंट के लिये तय्यारी हो रही है .)
2. जाती और वर्ग: एक मार्क्सवादी दृष्टिकोण (बहस्तलब लेखों का संकलन) पृष्ठ: 148. पेपर बाक. मूल्य: रु.60.
3. बज्जान केलिये अर्थशास्त्र (मार्क्स की पूंजी पर आधारित पाठ). पृष्ठ: 372. रायल सैज. पेपर बाक. मूल्य: रु.120.
4. रामायण विषद्वक्षम [पीठिका, 16 कहानिया, 11 लिंक कहानिया, 16 लेख और 504 पादटिप्पनिया] पृष्ठ: 720. रायल सैज. पेपर बाक. मूल्य: रु.150.
5. घरेलू काम और बाहरी काम. पृष्ठ: 144. पेपर बाक. मूल्य: रु. 40. (इस किताब का पंजाबी अनुवाद भी मिलेगी)
6. दर्शन शास्त्र.पृष्ठ:288. पेपर बाक.रायल सैज.मूल्य: रु. 60.
7. अंग्रेजी के घने जंगल में प्रवेश करे ! हिंदी छात्रों केलिये अंग्रेजी ग्रामर पाठ ! पृष्ठ:464. पेपर बाक.रायल सैज.मूल्य: रु. 200.

PUNJABI TRANSLATIONS:

- 1) **BAHEYA'N LYEE ARTHSHASHTER.** Pages:376. Price: Rs.100.
- 2) **DARSHANSHASHTER.** Pages:288. Price: Rs.80.
- 3) **GHRELU KAM ATE BAHRI KAM.** Pages:136. Price: Rs.40.

FOR COPIES:

- (1) **Shahid Bhagat Singh Book Center,** Punjabi Bhavan, Ludhiana. Phone: 09417642785
- (2) **JAN CHETNA,** D-68, Nirala Nagar, LUCKNOW-226006. Phones: 05224108495, 9721481546.
janchetna.books@gmail.com

MARATHI TRANSLATIONS:

- 1) **MULAAMSAATHI ARTHASASTRA.** (marathiya 'bhaandval'yaagrathaavaraadhaaritdhade). Pages: 368. Paper back. 1/8 demy size. Price: Rs.120.E-version of this book is available at a much lower price in Google playbooks as well as Amazon kindle books. [For copies: Lok Vagmay Griha, People's Book House, Mumbai. Or Rupesh Patkar: 9404759156 & 9623665321.]

KANNADA TRANSLATIONS:

- 1) **SHRAMA SHOSHANEYA VISHWAVANNU BADALAYISABEKU.** Pgs: 344. PB. 1/8th demy size. Price: Rs. 60.
- 2) **MAKKALIGAAGI ARTHASASTRA.** Pages: 424. Royal size. Price: Rs.100
- 3) **MARX VAADADA MELINA TEEKEGALIGE UTTARAGALUI** Pages: 154. Price: Rs. 50. [For copies of Kannada books: Shriya Madhyama private Limited, Bengaluru-560086. Phones: 9036082005 & 080-23494488.]

TAMIL TRANSLATIONS:

- 1) **SAATHIYA PRICHINAIKKU THEERUVU: BUDDHAR PODHAADHU, AMBEDKARUM PODHAADHU, MARX AVASIYA THEVAL.** Pages: 416. Paper back. Royal demy size. Price: Rs.80. [For copies: Nirmala Kotravai: 7338823667.]

“Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to excite disaffection towards, the government established by law in [India] shall be punished with imprisonment to life, to which fine may be added or with imprisonment which may extend to three years, to which fine may be added, or with fine.....”

With the becoming of Sri N V Ramana, J, an ardent religious devotee but somewhat influenced by radical social transformation concepts in his student days, as the Chief Justice of India, the need and relevance of the Sedition Clause—Section 124A IPC—came to the fore when some writ petitions were filed questioning its constitutionality; and the same judicially queried in Court and an interim order was passed to be operative all over India that nobody be arrested/pursued under Section 124A IPC even if it is charged on them. Some excerpts from the Order dated 11-05-2022 in *S G Vombatkere v. Union of India* (WP (C) No. 682/2021 & others) by a three Judge Bench comprising Sri N V Ramana, CJI, Surya Kant, J. and Hima Kohli, J. are relevant and important to be cited here:

“... petitions filed challenging the constitutionality of Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code... the offence of sedition.”

Then the Court referred extensively to the affidavit filed by the Government of India in this regard:

“On 09.05.2022, an affidavit... filed on behalf of Union of India, averring ...:

“...so far as Section 124A is concerned, there are divergence of views expressed in public domain by various jurists, academicians, intellectuals and citizens in general. While they agree about the need for statutory pro-

visions to deal with serious offences of divisive nature affecting the very sovereignty and integrity of the Country, acts leading to destabilising the government established by law by means not authorised by law or prohibited by law. ...However, concerns are raised about its application and abuse for the purposes not intended by law.

The Hon’ble Prime Minister of India has been cognisant of various views expressed on the subject and has also periodically, in various forums, expressed his clear and unequivocal views in favour of protection of civil liberties, respect for human rights and giving meaning to the constitutionally cherished freedoms by the people of the country. He has repeatedly said that one of India’s strengths is the diverse thought streams that beautifully flourish in our country.

The Hon’ble PM believes that at a time when our nation is marking ‘Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav’ (75 years since independence) we need to, as a nation, work even harder to shed colonial baggage that has passed its utility, which includes outdated colonial laws and practices. In that spirit, the Government of India has scrapped over 1500 outdated law since 2014-15. ...an ongoing process. These were laws and compliances which reeked of a colonial mind set and thus have no place in today’s India.

The Government of India, being fully cognisant of various view being expressed on the subject of sedition and also having considered the concern of civil liberties and human rights, while committed to maintain and protect the sovereignty and integrity of this great nation, has decided to *re-examine and re-consider*

the provision of section 124A of the Indian Penal Code which can only be done before the Competent Forum.

In view of the aforesaid it is this respectfully submitted that this Hon’ble Court may not invest time in examining the validity of Section 124A once again and be pleased to await the exercise of reconsideration to be undertaken by the Government of India...”

Appreciating the tenor and purport of the affidavit, the Court held:

“...It is clear that the Union of India agrees with the prima facie opinion expressed by this Court that the rigours of Section 124A of IPC is not in tune with the current social milieu, and was intended for a time when this country was under the colonial regime. In light of the same, the Union of India may reconsider the aforesaid provision of law.

...Court is cognisant of security interests and integrity of the State on one hand, and the civil liberties of citizens on the other. There is a requirement to balance both sets of considerations, which is a difficult exercise. The case of the petitioners is that this provision of law dates back to 1898, and pre-dates the Constitution itself, and is being misused. The Attorney General had also, on an earlier date of hearing, given some instances of glaring misuse of this provision, like in the case of recital of the Hanuman Chalisa.

7. Therefore, we expect that, till the re-examination of the provision is complete, it will be appropriate not to continue the usage of the aforesaid provision of law by the Governments.
8. In view of the clear stand taken by the Union of India, we deem it appropriate to pass the following order in the interest of justice:

- a. The interim stay granted in W.P.(CrI.)No.217/2021 along with W.P.(CrI.)No.216/2021 vide order dated 31.05.2021 shall continue to operate till further orders.
- b. We hope and expect that the State and Central Governments will restrain from registering any FIR, continuing any investigation or taking any coercive measures by invoking Section 124A of IPC while the aforesaid provision of law is under consideration.
- c. If any fresh case is registered under Section 124A of IPC, the affected parties are at liberty to approach the concerned Courts for appropriate relief. The Courts are requested to examine the reliefs sought, taking into account the present order passed as well as the clear stand taken by the Union of India.
- d. All pending trials, appeals and proceedings with respect to the charge framed under Section 124A of IPC are kept in abeyance. Adjudication with respect to other Sections, if any, could proceed if the Courts are of the

opinion that no prejudice would be caused to the accused.

- e. In addition to the above, the Union of India shall be at liberty to issue the Directive as proposed and placed before us, to the State Governments/Union Territories to prevent any misuse of Section 124A of IPC.”

The latest order dated 1 May 2023 in this writ petition reads:

1. “Mr R Venkataramani, Attorney General for India, states that, in pursuance of the order dated 11 May 2022, the Government has initiated the process of re-examining the provisions of Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code 1860 and the consultations are at a substantially advanced stage.
2. In view of the above submission, on the request of the Attorney General, we direct that the proceedings be posted on 8 August 2023”.

[CJI (Mr Justice Chandrachud) and Pardiwala J.]

Very Recently this writer had a telephonic talk with Sri Binayak Sen (based in Kolkata) who clarified that his appeal against the life sentence

passed on him under Section 124A IPC is pending in the Chattisgarh High Court and as per the above decision of the Apex Court he also applied for keeping that in abeyance. He expressed the hope that not in distant future the sedition clause might itself be removed from the penal code but pointed out that he was also charged under the draconian UAPA (Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 1967) the provisions of which continue to suffocate his liberties.

Human Rights bodies across the country condemn the section 124A of the Indian Penal Code and support the order of the honourable bench presided by Chief Justice of Supreme court N V Ramana to keep all pending trials, appeals and proceedings with respect to the charge framed under Section 124A of the Indian penal Code on hold, which deals with the offence of sedition till the central government completes the promised exercise to reconsider and re-examine the provision. If anything the Supreme Court should evaluate the constitutional validity of the Section 124A of the Indian penal Code and completely repeal the draconian law. □□

A BIO-WEAPON? MADE IN CHINA-OR IN THE US?

Back Story of Covid-19— Pandemic or Plandemic?

Pranjali Bandhu

COVID-19, THE CORONA Virus Disease, ostensibly manifesting in December 2019 in China, went on to become a global pandemic infecting billions, killing millions, overwhelmingly the elderly with co-morbidities, the homeless, and not sparing children, making it into a veritable war on the people.

Viruses, bacteria and other microbes can cause mild or devastat-

ing diseases, and epidemics and pandemics have been with people through history. They are usually related to times of war, spread through trade and travel routes, certain agricultural practices, and affect the poor in urban and semi-urban areas, who live in unsanitary conditions, the most. In the case of India there is no evidence of large-scale epidemics and pandemics before the colonial period. The eco-

nomie development that took place under colonialism involved greater ecological disturbance and much migrant labour allowing the spread of diseases outside the area of outbreak, and even to other countries due to increase in trade. In a globalised imperialist world system intensive industrial agriculture with its greater encroachment of wilderness, resource extraction, increased fossil fuel usage and ensuing global warming and climate change, bio-weapons stockpiling etc. the frequency and quick spread of spilled over contagious diseases among humans, animals and plants has increased. For one thing this is an Age of Pandemics.

Covid-19 is the latest among them. Long-term adverse health impacts, so-called Long Covid, are there. There is heightened danger of heart failure and strokes; psychological well-being is also impacted, causing depression, anxiety, confusion, fear. Psychiatric disorders among children have been reported due to their being cooped up without freedom of movement and adequate socialising opportunities with peer groups when schools were closed over a prolonged period. Preschoolers have been particularly affected: unable to speak, socialise, and share, lacking focus and motor control. Mortality rates went up due to lack of access to health-care facilities for other ailments during the lockdowns. General debilitation and lack of wellness made people prone to further infections and diseases, affecting their working capacity. Without understanding origins or causes, it will be difficult to implement adequate preventive measures for possible future pandemics and repeated recurrence of already circulating infectious diseases.

Scientists are divided in their opinion regarding the origins of this virus. Some are of the view that it is a zoonotic spill-over from bats over an intermediate host to humans. Others assert that it is a man-made virus that accidentally leaked from a low security level BSL-2 (Bio-safety Level 2) lab inside an institute that was engaged in bio-warfare research. Yet another view holds this to be a Pandemic unleashed by powerful elites with pecuniary gains in mind and with the objective of overcoming a periodic economic crisis intrinsic to a capitalist world economy. There is a fringe view that holds electro smog, toxic living conditions and the introduction of 5G mobile telephony around the world to be responsible. The turning on of 5-G wireless in

Wuhan with a grid of 10,000 antennas in the months preceding the outbreak causing unprecedented electromagnetic pollution is pinpointed as the cause.

While electro smog and air pollution have their environmental and health impacts and can increase transmissibility, morbidity and mortality due to constrained immunity, in this writer's view they cannot be taken as the origin of the disease.

Robert G Wallace, an evolutionary epidemiologist, points to global food production and distribution systems as the underlying cause for the multiple epidemics and pandemics the currently faces. Rich and diverse ecosystems provide a natural barrier against viral outbreaks because a large distance between humans and potentially harmful viruses is maintained. This is a function that sacred groves serve in India. Biodiversity makes it harder for pathogenic viruses to consistently find an appropriate host from which to mutate and spread; they get more easily burnt out and thus contained. Large-scale, mono-cultural plant and animal industrial agriculture, burgeoning urbanisation, resource extraction through mining and logging, all lead to deforestation. By growing livestock and plants having near identical genomes there are no immune firebreaks that would hinder quick transmission. The industry's emphasis on high throughput provides a continually renewed supply of susceptible plant and animal life that facilitate a particular virus's growth. In the case of broiler chickens, because the age of slaughter is low (6 weeks), this selects for viruses that can survive more robust immune systems and the entire production system promotes their evolution into more virulent and infectious strains. The network of agricultural exports and imports across vast regions and countries aids their

spread causing epidemics and pandemics.

The solution offered by Wallace and others holding a similar viewpoint is to develop revolutionary cooperative forms of ecological agriculture that is not environmentally destructive, that promotes strategic re-wilding allowing animals to breed on-site, makes for food sovereignty, and puts people's and planetary health, justice, and equity above the super profits of a few.

Africa and China are the regions from where a good number of recent viral pathogens have originated. In Africa, deforestation pushed by intensive agriculture, mining, logging and other resource grabs under the aegis of neo-liberal agro and other businesses paves the way for spill-over infections that then find their way to other parts of the world through myriad trade and travel routes. In China, large-scale agriculture and animal husbandry including wildlife farms have led to major shifts in land-use patterns and ecosystem changes increasing zoonotic spill-over.

The Huanan Seafood market in Wuhan, where wild animals are also sold, is pointed as the originating place of the pandemic, however, without precisely locating the intermediate host animal for SARS-CoV-2, which shares 96% of its genome with the virus found in horseshoe bats. The pangolin is mentioned as the animal in which possibly, but not conclusively, recombination happened, but pangolins were not among the animals being sold at this 'wet' market. Moreover, the first human cases had no connection with this market. The lab-leak proponents, therefore, consider it to be an amplifying and not originating centre. This lacuna and other characteristics of the virus give steam to the narrative of it being a lab-manipulated one through bio-tech-

nology with the possible aim of being used as a bio-weapon.

Another narrative sees the entire pandemic as a planned ‘conspiracy’ by US-based finance capital led by the three investment corporations of BlackRock, Vanguard and State Street, shareholders in 90% of listed companies worldwide, to bail it out from a debt-ridden meltdown. The following facts are brought forward to buttress the allegation that the pandemic is a toolkit of interlocked vested interests:

A 2010 document of the Rockefeller Foundation titled, “Scenarios for the Future of Technology and International Development” talks of a pandemic and economic collapse, and mentions lockdown, quarantine, curfew, and other top-down authoritarian control measures to combat it.

Philanthro-capitalist Bill Gates, proponent of eugenics and depopulation, and vaccine king, had publicly announced that a global pandemic was on its way and could wipe out 30 million people. In 2018, Gates Foundation’s Institute for Disease Modelling, made a video called ‘A Simulation for A Global Flu Pandemic’ in which they show a flu virus originating in China, from Wuhan, and spreading all over the world.

In September 2019, the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board, a joint arm of the WHO and the World Bank, released a report titled ‘A World at Risk’. It stressed the need to be prepared for a corona virus outbreak! Its cover has a corona virus and people wearing face masks. The report says: “The United Nations (including WHO) conducts at least two system-wide training and simulation exercises, including one for covering the deliberate release of a lethal respiratory pathogen.”

In October 2019, Event 201—a global pandemic exercise—was

organised, coordinated jointly by the John Hopkins Biosecurity Centre, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the World Economic Forum.

The first case of a new disease was reported in China early December that year, but it was initially hushed up by the Chinese government. In the last week of January 2020, when the numbers of infected people had risen, the Chinese government put Wuhan and other cities of Hubei Province under lockdown. After the considerable world-wide spread of the viral infection, on 11 March 2020, the WHO director said that this was a pandemic and measures had to be taken accordingly by individual countries.

On the advice that had been laid down in a White Paper issued by BlackRock on 15 August 2019, the US Federal Reserve injected over 9 trillion US\$ into the economy between September 2019 and March 2020. Under cover of the pandemic the monies injected by the Fed under BlackRock’s management was used not for investment but to bail out finance capital so that it could continue its speculative activities. Lockdowns were imposed; with them came the suspension of much manufacturing activity and business transactions, which drained the demand for credit from an insolvent financial market. Hyperinflation was dodged by keeping the real economy insulated through periodic lockdowns, which also helped in an authoritarian regimentation of the people, as envisaged in the 2010 Rockefeller document. For instance, in India, the strong anti-CAA and student protests had to withdraw during the pandemic, though it could not deter a determined farmers’ movement.

People know that industrial capitalism has become financial capitalism because a labour-based economy is unprofitable for it. In the search for super profits more

and more labour power gets ejected and replaced by automation. Investments are done in the financial sector rather than in the real economy, or in socially constructive sectors like education, health, research and other public services.

According to Klaus Schwab, founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, a pro-corporate NGO, COVID-19 has enhanced and accelerated the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which restructures capitalist imperialism through the new technologies of AI, robotics, the Internet of Things, autonomous vehicles, 3D printing, nanotechnology, quantum computing, big data analytics, cloud computing, 5G and so on, which are aimed at enhancing privately owned wealth, and not distributing it equitably. The WEF, IMF, WHO, and the corporate sector in general have used the pandemic to fast forward this kind of ‘Great Reset.’

Sectors that profited enormously during the pandemic were Big Tech (through digitisation of the economy) and Big Pharma (through sales of vaccines and pharmaceutical drugs). Vaccines were developed for emergency use, often with government support, without time-consuming (the usual time is 5 years) adequate evaluation in animal models and clinical testing for safety and efficacy. In the end, despite booster doses, people are getting infected, though it is claimed the vaccination has lowered death rates, intense illness, and hospitalisation. Adverse reactions, autoimmune diseases, myocarditis and pericarditis, blood clots with the possibility of heart attacks, even deaths due to vaccines have been reported.

The RT-PCR test too is not reliable. Test-kits, masks, and PPE makers profited, but the masses of plastic waste produced have ended up polluting the earth and the

oceans further. While during this period unemployment, precarity and poverty rose exponentially, billionaires increased their net worth, corporates their profits, and the stock market remains vibrant. The maximum number of people becoming poor was reported from India. And world over deaths from hunger cross those dying from Covid!

This chilling account of how the Virus was weaponised by US-based finance capital, big tech and big pharma as well as corrupt governments to their ends does not fully address the question of its origins.

Viruses, bacteria, and other natural and synthetic toxins can and have been weaponised since ancient times. In both World Wars the antagonists used biological weapons targeting humans, animals or plants. During the Second World War and Cold War periods the US developed biological and chemical warfare capability and utilised it. From 1943-69 such research was done under a Biological Weapons Programme at Fort Detrick, Maryland. Scientists bred germs to be resistant to antibiotics and other drug therapies. Now renamed as a Biological Defense Programme or Strategy it is a combined effort along with private enterprises and other stakeholders. The US Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID) is housed in Fort Detrick and has bio-medical labs equipped to research and develop pathogenic viruses.

Research on biological agents and toxins for use in warfare is being conducted in other countries too. There are many such labs all over the world and hundreds in the US. This is despite the fact that their development, production, acquisition, transfer, stockpiling and use has been banned by the UN 1972 Biological Weapons Convention, signed by almost all countries. It

must be noted that the US is the only country that opposes the establishment of a verification mechanism for the Biological Weapons Convention, although laboratory accidents have taken place. It is reported that by 1960 hundreds of American scientists and technicians were hospitalised, victims of the diseases they had been trying to weaponise. A USA Today exposé of 2014 says that between 2008 and 2012 there were more than 1,100 laboratory incidents involving dangerous bacteria, viruses and toxins in the US.

Some scientists have tried to substantiate the man-made lab-origin theory by analysing the gene sequence of this virus. Features of this virus that distinguish it from SARS Cov-1 are that it can be spread by asymptomatic people, has a very strong protective outer shell making it more resilient and active for a longer period, and that it is particularly fast in replication and mutation and more pathogenic. Using biotechnology to change the features is carried out in the name of 'gain of function' involving genes manipulation that enhances greater transmissibility in humans.

India also has Bio-safety Level 2, 3 and 4 labs to carry out investigation of highly infectious pathogens. By understanding how viruses evolve and by getting ahead of Nature through gene manipulation, it is thought that one can predict and prepare for possible natural spillovers through treatment and vaccines. In the view of Dr Anthony Fauci, Chief Medical Advisor to the US President, who was instrumental in the initial suppression of the possible lab leak theory, Nature in the worst bioterrorist that is always coming up with new threats, which have to be met in a confrontationist way. The Global Virome Project (initiated to discover viral threats)

estimates 1.7 million unknown viruses in wild animals, half of which have zoonotic potential.

The Wuhan Institute of Virology, from where this particular virus is believed to have leaked, engages in 'gain of function' research. After the 2003 SARS-1 outbreak in China, the government had approached and received help from France to set up a P-4 laboratory in the WIV to combat possible similar infectious disease outbreaks. Earlier, P-3 labs had been set up in China, also with French help. The BSL-4 lab was designed by French experts and partially funded by the French government. It started functioning in 2018; fifty French researchers were expected to take residency and provide technical expertise and training, but this did not happen. The WIV collaborated with the Canadian National Microbiology Laboratory and the Galveston National Laboratory in the US too.

The National Institutes of Health, a biomedical research agency under the US Department of Health and Human Services, funded US and Chinese scientists to work collaboratively on collecting SARS-like viruses. In 2014, a 5-year grant through the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAD), under the NIH, and headed by Anthony Fauci, was given to EcoHealth Alliance, a US-based non-profit research group to conduct bat corona virus research in partnership with the WIV which involved gain of function. Further funding sources were the US Defense Threat Reduction Agency of the Department of Defense and PREDICT, which was a component of USAID's "Emerging Pandemic Threats" programme aimed at Asia, Africa and Latin America, considered hotspot areas for zoonotic diseases that comprise nearly 75% of new, emerging and re-emerging diseases.

Among policy advisors of EcoHealth Alliance is David Franz, former Commander at Fort Detrick's US Army Medical Research Institute for Infectious Diseases and its partners include universities such as the University of Texas, Medical Branch, Galveston, whose work is closely related to bio-warfare (so-called bio-defense), and major corporations like Johnson and Johnson and Colgate Palmolive. Some such farmed out G-O-F research including experiments with corona viruses began to be done in risky BSL-2 labs in the WIV. Safety standards at the WIV were noted to be sub-standard. Internationally renowned virologist, Dr Shi Zengli, who had received her training in France and the US, was part of the team. She and Peter Daszak of EcoHealth Alliance worked together on the horse-shoe bat virus and new functional components may have been overlaid onto or inserted into its genome. Papers about this work got published between 2016 and 2019. And it is conjectured that this is what slipped out during an experiment one day. The problem with any biotechnological product is that it develops its own trajectory and cannot be controlled once released.

This was after the Obama government had halted funding for such "gain of function research of concern" in the US itself due to bio-safety concerns. A number of scientists had called for restraint and sanity with regard to such creation of potential pandemic pathogens. G-o-F research cannot prevent, but will only create difficult to address pandemics, they said. It is documented that the SARS virus had escaped from labs 3 times between 2003 and 2011. There have been recorded escapes of pathogens between 1990 and 2011 (from Taiwan, England and the then SU) from highest security level BSL-4

labs, too. However, the pause in funding this risky research was quietly lifted in 2017.

In 2019, the project with the WIV was renewed for another 5 years, but the US pulled out in 2020 after the Covid-2 outbreak. The Chinese government's initial response was to suppress news about it. Then, after officially reporting it to the WHO, it closed down all virus database records at the WIV from any sort of scrutiny. Its Ministry of Education sent out a directive regarding strict control over any paper that traces the origin of the virus. The lab was handed over to Major General Chen Wei, a researcher at the Military Medical Research Institute of the Academy of Military Sciences. By mid-March the first vaccine had been developed by her. This kind of military-civil collaboration and fusion is not peculiar to China.

The needle of suspicion is being pointed to US labs also, of which two dozen are BSL-4 ones, as a possible source of, if not the virus itself, the biotechnology that made it possible. The US labs are not yet sufficiently investigated. The NIH has resisted disclosing details of its work on SARS-viruses and such research continues to be done. In fact, since labs doing such experiments are there in various countries it could have leaked from any of them. Both Spain and Italy reported the presence of SARS-CoV-2-like viruses in their countries in March and September, 2019, though with the caveat that more data, more studies, and more samples were required to corroborate this finding. This could be proof of its non-lab zoonotic spillover origins also.

All these hypotheses need to be kept on the table; they are by no means mutually exclusive. In an Age where epidemics and pandemics are coming up due to systemic rea-

sons to 'prepare' for another one is quite natural on the part of the elites in terms of how best to utilise such situations to their advantage, which is what they have done.

No government, neither the Chinese nor the US, is interested in the actual facts coming out and are actually colluding with each other in this cover-up of origins since they are both implicated in and collaborate in this dangerous research. Since their economies are quite strongly interlinked, there is not just contention due to China's rising status as a big imperialist power, but certainly also collusion in this relationship. The WHO, too, being funded by big pharmaceutical corporations and governments, is complicit in this cover-up.

The manner in which the Covid-19 story has played itself out it seems to confirm the thesis of capitalism today being catabolic in nature. Catabolic capitalism is a self-cannibalising system whose insatiable hunger for profit can only be fed by devouring the society that sustains it, gorging itself on one self-inflicted disaster after another with militarism, nationalism and authoritarianism being its key components. The pandemic induced temporary boom for some global companies is now ending up in a bust situation, for e.g., for IT majors and leading to enormous numbers of lay-offs and joblessness and indebtedness. Europe is again entangled in war and there is world-wide recession.

People must respect the laws of Nature, restore the lost ecological balance, and drastically reduce polluting activity. These are the only viable and lasting solutions. In truth only a socialist reset could possibly save humanity. □□□

Readers are requested to note the changed address (new) of our website
www.frontierweekly.com

EXPERIENCES OF LECTURES

Bhagat Singh in Canada

Chaman Lal*

A SERIES OF LECTURES ON Bhagat Singh and his ideas of revolution were planned by Indo-Canadian Workers Association (ICWA) Brampton in March 2020. The series was to begin from Brampton and was to be taken to other cities of Canada by either branches of ICWA or like-minded other groups or organisations. Due to onset of Covid-19 in mid-March 2020, whole Canada was shut up like other parts of the world, including India, so the series was postponed but not cancelled.

ICWA has different leadership in different cities, such as radicals lead ICWA in Ontario province, whereas CPM-oriented people manage it in British Columbia State's cities. There is East India Defence Committee, which was set up by Hardial Bains, a leader of Ghadar Communist Party, a radical Maoist party at one time and very strong in many cities which launched many anti-racist struggles. There were other Progressive Cultural and Writers' Associations among organisers of this lecture series. There were and are many left oriented journals also published from Canada. At one Hari P Sharma's organisation IPANA and later (SANSAD) were much known, it used to bring out bi-lingual journal in Punjabi and English. Nowadays it is extinct, but some weeklies or monthlies continued for some more years like *The Asian Times* edited by Prithviraj Kalia in four languages-Hindi, Punjabi, English and Urdu or *Nawin Duniya* in Punjabi had continued the trend. During Covid crisis both *Nawin Duniya* and *Asian Times* ceased publication. But journals like *Sarokaran*

di Awaz or *Radical Desi* still continue to hold the ground! Print or online print media has given it over now to electronic media like Radio, which is most popular, TV or podcasts! Many activists of old radical organisations have passed away like Chin Banerjee. Banerjee had written obituary of Hari P Sharma at his passing away in 2010. Both Chin Bannerjee and Hari P Sharma served as Professors in Canadian Universities and had earned laurels as academicians. Hari P Sharma's old associate in IPANA, Raj Chauhan is now Speaker of British Columbia Legislature assembly.

The pending series of lectures materialised in March 2023.

In 2023, invitations from Surrey, Edmonton, Calgary and Montreal were received even before landing up in Canada. In year 2011, while on way to San Francisco in USA to deliver lecture on Ghadar party young hero Kartar Singh Sarabha on his birthday, I had stopped at Edmonton and Surrey to deliver lectures/meetings on Bhagat Singh Dalit literature. On my return to India in January 2012 from the assignment of Visiting Professor in Hindi at The University of West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine campus in Trinidad, I had my return journey through Toronto, so a lecture on Che Guevara and Bhagat Singh was organised at Brampton by Rationalist Society. At that very time, friends in Canada, especially Amrit Dhillon, husband of Bhagat Singh niece Inderjit at Brampton had expressed desire to arrange a lecture series, though many books of mine on Bhagat Singh came out after 2011-12. Amrit Dhillon's efforts through ICWA

brought fruit in the form of lecture series in March 2023!

I touched Toronto airport at 6 am on 24th March. Bhagat Singh niece Inderjit and her husband Amrit Dhillon were there at airport to receive me. Both not in very good health and Amrit Dhillon nearing 80 years, I was feeling a bit guilty.

Amrit Dhillon and ICWA had planned some Radio and TV interviews for propagating the event of 26th March, which included my lecture for 45 minutes on revolutionary ideas of Bhagat Singh and a one-hour play based on Bhagat Singh's last days in prison by Punjabi playwright Davinder Daman. Though for Canadian Indians/Punjabis Bhagat Singh is most popular iconic figure for their socio-politico-cultural events, their main focus is more on plays in Punjabi. As play can engage people from different age and mental level, from kids to older people. It is a kind of fulfilling their aesthetic needs also, as most of Canadian Punjabis/Indians have not got integrated with Canada's own original citizens of white or of some mix races. Canada as a nation or country is also not of ancient times. It was founded much later than USA, became a nation and has huge lands, mostly still uninhabited. Punjabis out of Indians had started reaching in Canada in early 1900's and the first Gurdwara which was built in 1908 at Surrey was demolished by none else than Punjabis themselves to build a housing complex. There was resistance by some Punjabis/Indians against demolition, but the greed was more powerful than religious feelings and now only a token plaque is put up indicating the place to be the first ever Gurdwara of Canada built in 1908. However, the Gurdwara built in Abbotsford in 1911, stands as historic Gurdwara with a museum and Kamagatamaru ship monu-

ments as the ship had landed at Vancouver in July 1914. It was made to wait at the seashore only for two months with 376 passengers onboard; only very few could land with court intervention. The remaining passengers had to travel back for two months to Bajbaj Ghat near Calcutta, where British colonial police fired upon them killing 20 passengers, whose memorial is built on the spot of shooting, which was inaugurated by first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and was taken care of Chittagong revolutionary Ganesh Ghosh for long time till his death.

Though I could impress the audience of nearly full Pearson Hall with around 300 people as most of the people in audience had never heard of those things which I generally speak to Indian audience or audiences outside India, I had to wind up before I could exhaust all the ideas, which I summed up in brief. There was no time for discussion as audience was waiting for the play and some songs. A poem of Faiz Ahmad Faiz was sung with modern instruments by a Canadian Pakistani, which was appreciated.

A day before the lecture I may have appeared in 2-3 radio or TV interviews and on 26th March itself, after the lecture, I went through two-hour long interview on one local YouTube channel of Nahar Aujla. In Canada, especially among Punjabis/Indians, radio is most popular mode of information. Very few people have subscribed to any newspaper in Canada, none in houses I enjoyed hospitality.

I was to leave for Abbotsford for few lectures in Surrey and Vancouver area for ten days, so I left Toronto on flight on 28th March, while on 27th giving some more interviews or outing, it was light raining season with moderate cold weather in most of Canada during my visit from

24th March to 1st May for almost five weeks.

At Abbotsford small airport, Taraksheel Society activist couple Paramjit and her husband picked me up and came over to their beautiful house on riverside. Next day on 29th April, I had to go through interviews with Canadian electronic media on different channels, most famous being Red FM and Connect, but smaller ones like Sher-e-Punjab like channels also had their studios. I appeared in short and longer interviews at channels as well as home set up studios for YouTube channels. One well known Indian journalist from Times of India-Manimugdha Sharma is now part of Red FM as well as doing research from Fraser University of British Columbia. In Canada, one may do as many jobs in the day combining Govt and private jobs legally. Among Punjabis/Indians it is a craze to work more hours, sometimes sixteen hours or more in a single day. Even when they have weekly break of two days, they take up private jobs of property dealing or work as realtors! Most of Punjabis with Govt. or private full time regular jobs, indulge in property dealing on weekends! As some of Punjabi hosts said that all are running after earning dollars-Canadian currency is also dollar, its value slightly less than US dollar. The situation has changed a lot after my last visit in 2012, when this kind of dollar earning rat race was not there, or less visible! Even when parents or kins of Punjabi/Indians settled as citizens of Canada are invited to stay permanently with children, they are also pushed into doing jobs like cherry/blue berry picking or such kind of jobs. People in their 80's even 90's do work from home doing translations etc, which are well paid.

One may look at this tendency critically, but one has to admit that there is no distinction between white

collar or blue-collar jobs. People go in for the jobs which fetch them more money and blue-collar jobs are paid more! So, Indians shedding their inhibition for menial or labour jobs, take up hard working jobs which pay more bucks. Academicians of repute in India, who remained Professors in colleges and Universities, when come over to Canada, they forget the nose of their old academic career and accept jobs like bus driving without any inhibition! Long drives of goods trucks earn lot of bucks, more than other blue-collar jobs, so most of Punjabi settlers had heavy vehicle driving as profession for a length of time to enable them to buy a house. Housing is well organised. So first they go for two-bedroom flats with underground basement, which is generally rented to Indian students in Canada. With that earning they work many extra hours and reach in a position to go for a three-bedroom flat. Bank loans are easily available. Flats get pledged to bank for the amount they spend on buying. There is no Indian notion of 'my home' they change the homes like changing the clothes, buying new ones after a couple of years. So, 2 to 3, 3 to 4, 4 to five-room house, the race continues all the time leaving no time for leisure or entertainment. Many of them have houses in 2-3 cities, even in American cities as travelling and working in American cities is as easy as inside Canada!

As I was to spend almost ten days in Vancouver area, apart from visiting some historic sites and sight-seeing I wished my friends to organise as many meetings as possible during my stay, whether small in house meetings, or public hall meetings. After staying one or two nights at Surrey I moved to Abbotsford with a young relative. I had a second visit to historic 1911 built Gurdwara, which was once the centre of Ghadarite activists, in whose langar

hall I was honoured with Siropa and a medal in 2011 by then MLA and minister Raj Chauhan, who is now Speaker of British Columbia assembly, but had his long association with Hari P Sharma's radical left organisation. Raj Chauhan and other friends belong to NDP party, strong in British Columbia, where Ujjal Dosanjh, grandson of a Ghadarite from Hoshiarpur district of Punjab was the Premier one time or Chief Minister, in Indian political sense. I had met Ujjal Dosanjh in 2011 as well and during this visit also, we joined a dinner held by a common friend. He became controversial for changing parties, while losing his seat in elections. Ujjal has now taken to writing and one part of his autobiography was released in Delhi recently by his publisher Speaking Tiger in Delhi.

During my stay in Vancouver area, I visited British Columbia provincial assembly in Victoria, where one has to ferry by ship from Vancouver. During 2011 also I had visited and wished that in some way the reference to Bhagat Singh should come on record of assembly proceedings. Last time Harry Bains, Raj Chahuan and Jagroop Brar were our hosts, and Rachna Singh was part of us as visitors. (This time Rachna Singh was minister herself, though we could not meet!) Time was so short that we could not watch the proceedings of assembly. This time however it was pleasant surprise as we were invited by a Filipino background MLA Mable Egmores, who was once part of Drivers Union, led by Kirpal Bains, who was President of Drivers Union, and Mable was her deputy in union as Vice President. She was the one who extended an invitation to be her guest and visit Assembly premises and watch proceedings of the assembly. She received five of us warmly at Assembly gate and took us around the com-

plex, where at one place pictures of all early Premiers were displayed including one of Ujjal Dosanjh. While in huge assembly library I could not gift any book, as I was left with none, but did present brochure of Bhagat Singh archives and Resource centre to be displayed. As we also met Niki Sharma the law minister in the assembly complex, I wished to present Bhagat Singh's writings in Hindi to her, but she expressed her inability to read Hindi, though her parental background is from Jalandhar area of Punjab. We were introduced to Assembly speaker, who happened to be Raj Chauhan, a Hari P Sharma follower once, I presented the copy of *Understanding Bhagat Singh* to him and he invited us to watch the proceedings in afternoon session, when he will be chairing. In the meantime, Mable has managed to treat us as special visitors to be introduced to the members of assembly. I was first to be introduced by Jinny Sims, former MP and Minister to the house as Researcher on Bhagat Singh, the greatest icon of freedom struggle of India. Later Mable introduced the other four members of our group, especially mentioning Kirpal Bains to be her mentor in trade union! We got the copy of recording after some time. Not to be forgotten was the sumptuous lunch in assembly canteen, where minister Jagroop Brar met and MLA Jinny Sims joined for a while, expressing her concern about Khalistani and Amrik Singh's neo-Bhindrawalian activities. Jinny Sims's father was a communist activist in Punjab. We returned after that session and Mable Egmores came out to see us off. Mable once again referred to Bhagat Singh in assembly in context of a race done in his name. In Canada races are part and parcel of social life. Mable is part of queer movement of Canada and it does not affect her electoral prospects as

she had already won her seat for four times in a row

During my stay in Vancouver area, where I lived in Surrey, Abbotsford and Maple Field, few notable things are-visit to Abbotsford old fort Langley site, where the mention to aboriginal children being killed, which has been the hot topic of Canadian newspapers and society since few months. I saw their genocide monuments being built in the hearts of cities like Surrey, Edmonton, Calgary and Toronto, may be few other cities too. In those designated spaces, the design or pictures of skulls of aboriginal children, their dresses, shoes with the banners like every child matters etc have been displayed and they attract huge attention of visitors. In most of place the use of Punjabi along with English and French was quite common.

Other smaller meetings in Surrey area was one at Jarnail Singh artist's studio. A small indoor meeting, in which Punjabi senior writer of Pakistani origin Fauzia Rafique joined. CPM activists also held indoor meeting at Kulwant Dhesi spacious house with respectable presence and meaningful discussion, in which historian Sohan Singh Pooni and activist Surinder Sangha joined in intense discussion. A larger public hall discussion was held in East India defence committee hall Surrey, where for more than two hours an exhaustive discussion was held on the role of Bhagat Singh's ideas to change the society on socialist principles.

Irony of the all these meetings was there were very few participants, who might have attended all meetings, not due to time constraints, but political constraints. Like their counterparts in India, they attend only their own faction or group's meeting despite commonality in views and need for broader unity.

After spending ten days in British

Columbia province, I moved to Alberta province with Capital at Edmonton. Here there is a strong Punjabi background group with Progressive Cultural platform with 85 years old Prithvi Raj Kalia as its main spirit. Kalia, himself a Hindi and English writer and retired official of Haryana Sahitya Akademi, contributed a lot after migrating to Canada post-retirement, bringing out *Asian Times*, bringing out books on Bhagat Singh, Ghadar Party, Marxism etc to mark the anniversaries. Jasvir Deol with Mangat Ram Pasla group political affiliation during his student days in Punjab is NDP popular MLA here. So, a well-attended public meeting was held here in a hall of Punjabi background Canadians. There was lively discussion. Mayor of Edmonton is a Punjabi background theatre activist, who was earlier a federal minister in Trudeau Govt. Amarjit Sohi came to see me after the meeting as he belonged to Trudeau's liberal party while Deol belonged to NDP. Amarjit Sohi with a family background from Sangrur

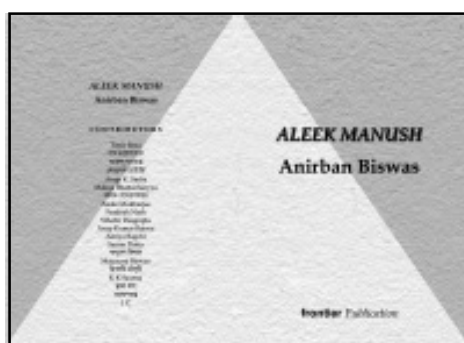
district of Punjab was a theatre activist, who in seventies had gone to Bihar to watch radical Naxal movement's cultural activities, where he was arrested by special cell of Bihar police. He was tortured like anything and could have even been eliminated given the circumstances, which have still not changed much, perhaps worsened. To his good fortune and to the bad fortune of Bihar police a young IAS Punjabi lady with academic and poetic background had just joined as Deputy Commissioner of Jahanabad district. She raided the circuit house where Sohi was being tortured and called for the police officers who tortured Sohi. Sohi was sent to hospital immediately and the brutal police officers, one in drunkard condition and threatening DC herself was bundled out of the district. Sohi suffered few years of prison and later as a free person, again led a protest demonstration of some workers to the same Deputy Commissioner, this encounter did not turn bitter and things were settled smoothly! Later Amarjit Sohi

migrated to Canada with whole family and in turn of the events became federal minister in Trudeau Govt. He continues to be the Mayor of Edmonton. Mayor post in Canadian system is very important. While meeting him, I asked him to display Bhagat Singh portrait in Mayoral office and get Bhagat Singh books in libraries of Edmonton. I am not sure whether they would do it as politicians in Canada, while more accessible and less arrogant than their Indian counterparts are not much different when coming to action.

My next lecture was very next day in Calgary, which is larger city of Alberta province. Here Taraksheel society organised lecture in a NGO hall again with large gathering and very congenial atmosphere for discussion. After spending a week in Alberta province, I returned to Ontario again for the last leg of my lecture tour as 30th April was the Taraksheel programme in same Pearson Hall in Brampton, from where I began on 26th March. After return to Ontario I stayed with dif-

A **frontier** Publication

Just Released



ALEEK MANUSH

Anirban Biswas

COMPILATION TEAM:

TIMIR BASU, ARUP SEN, NABINANDA SEN, TARUN BASU

CONTRIBUTORS:

TIMIR BASU, PARTHA CHATTOPADHYAY, SHUBHENDU DASGUPTA, DEBAPROSAD CHATTERJEE, ANUP K. SINHA, MAHUA BHATTACHARYYA, AMIT BANDYOPADHYAY, ALOKE MUKHERJEE, PRADOSH NATH, STHABIR

DASGUPTA, ARUP KUMAR BAISYA, AMIYA BAGCHI, SAMAR DATTA, BASUDEB BISWAS, MAUSUMI BISWAS, MITALI CHOWDHURY, K K SAXENA, MUKTA DAS, NAYAGANATANTRA, I C

Available at:

Frontier Office, Patiram Stall (College Street), Dhyانبindu and other book stalls selling issues of frontier.

Contribution: INR 100

ferent friends and visited my old friend and very sensitive Punjabi poet Navtej Bharti in London Ontario, almost one and half hours drive from Brampton. I had once translated his poem in Hindi-Ram Ab Ayodhya Nahin Lautenge-Rama will not return to Ayodhya now! It was in background of 1992 Babri Masjid demolition, it was published in popular Hindi daily *Jansatta*. Though this was equally good poem, the poem which got popular about this theme was Kaifi Azmi's. There were display of Che Guevara photos in his small but aesthetically beautiful villa. It was there that we talked about Bhootwara, of whose he and just one more Prem Pali are survivors as a day before Surjeet Lee, had expired in Patiala. In Brampton, one indoor meeting was held in the house of Arider Hundal, a member of Canadian Communist Party, who fought local election. His father a progressive poet Harbhajan Hundal was affiliated to Pasla group in Punjab, who passed away recently. One pleasant invitation came from Concordia University Montreal. Dolores Chew organised a meeting at a small hall in Concordia University on 26th April. It was the only academic meeting in the whole lecture tour, though it was of radical political thinkers' group. I was in hall just in time as I had missed a train to Montreal from Toronto, I was allowed to travel in next train without any additional charge with

a gap of three hours, the train journey itself was pleasant, meeting an Afghan student during the journey and arousing her interest in atheism of Bhagat Singh! Apart from a very useful and rich discussion at Montreal, I met Maya Khankhoje, daughter of legendary Ghadarite revolutionary Pandurang Khankhoje whom I had met in Delhi earlier and our JNU alumnus Diane Sha, while Anand, son of legendary Hindi writer Yashpal, who was instrumental in organising this meeting. I travelled to Ottawa, the capital of Canada from Montreal before returning to Brampton for the last meeting on 30th April.

As 30th April meeting organised by Taraksheel society was more focussed on a play by a Punjabi playwright, I was asked to speak briefly on Bhagat Singh, which I did with great precision.

The only major province and city I missed out was Winnipeg in Manitoba, for which I had invitation in 2020, but which could not materialise in 2023.

With this tenth and last meeting in Canada, my lecture tour was concluded and my return ticket was booked for 1st May. Out of these ten meetings, seven were public meetings and three were indoor meetings. There were book exhibitions in most of public meetings, but very exhibitions had my books on display except few. Though I had circulated the list of my books

to all organisers, but few of them got them for display.

Despite a successful tour one question continues to haunt this writer. Why Indians/ Panjabis who have chosen to take citizenship of Canada and are ministers/MLAs, part of ruling elite and yet they indulge more in Indian politics than in their adopted country? They don't question the Canadian Government for playing second fiddle to US in almost all international affairs. They find it easy to condemn or praise Indian Government, but don't question Canadian government. Perhaps if they start criticising Canadian Government for its pro-US policies their liberty to indulge in Indian politics will also get checked. The hypocrisy of Sonia Gandhi being a foreigner, so can't be an Indian PM, but how Indian background people at so many places become Presidents/Prime Ministers and are not called anti-national in the countries where they have become rulers, and Indian Government and people both celebrate it when Sunk becomes UK Premier, but in India any person of foreign origin is a suspect/ anti-national etc.

The return journey was as difficult as the first journey was but again this was compensated by watching the Satyajit Ray film *Jalsaghar* itself! □□□

[*Chaman Lal is a retired Professor of JNU and Honorary advisor to Bhagat Singh Archives and Resource Centre, New Delhi. His whatsapp no is 9868774820 and email is prof.chaman@gmail.com.]

SILVER LINE PROJECT

Political Economy of Speed Rail in Kerala

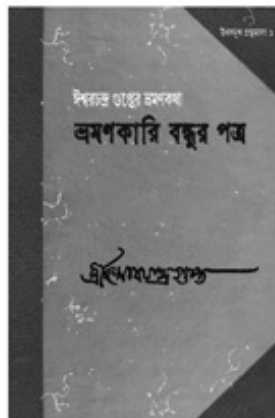
KT Rammohan

THE PUBLIC PROTEST AGAINST the Silver Line aka K-Rail, the speed rail project proposed by Kerala's Left-front government, was intense and widespread. As contractors began erecting con-

crete poles through the entire length of the state for land acquisition that would have displaced thousands of families in the densely populated state, large numbers of people, including children, came out to the

street in a peaceful protest, faced the police action, and courted arrest. This continued for several months. The agitation and the repression it invited were of such a scale that even the Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad, the people's science organisation closely linked to the ruling CPI(M), was prompted to react. It refrained from joining the agitation but came out with a per-

আক্ষরিকের বইপত্র



ভ্রমণকারি বন্ধুর পত্র
ইন্সরচন্দ্র গুপ্ত



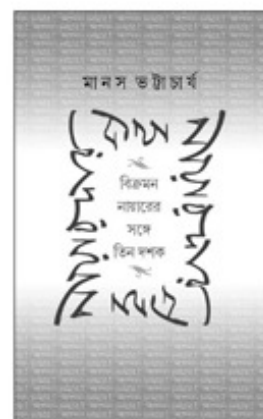
স্বয়ত্ত্ব আলো
বিশ্বজিৎ মাইতি



গোপনে নেশা ধরান
শৌভিক বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়

আ

১৯/২ রাধানাথ মল্লিক লেন, কলকাতা ৭০০০১২
ফোন: +৯১ ৯৮৩০১২০০৯০



নায়ারদার কথা
মানস ভট্টাচার্য



কবিতাসংগ্রহ
বিশ্বজিৎ পাল



শ্রমিকসাজ
বিজয় মাখাল



অপচ্ছায়
একরাম আলি

suasive pamphlet that pinpointed the adverse ecological and economic implications of the project and put forward a set of viable alternatives to improve the speed and quality of existing transportation without causing displacement in hordes. Alongside, leading writers, academics and social activists submitted a petition to the government praying for jettisoning the project.

Neither the public outcry nor the protest petition deterred the state government which declared that it would go ahead with the project, come what may. It parrot-mouthed the feasibility and desirability claims of speed rail as presented by SYSTRA, the multinational transport engineering consultancy firm which had prepared the project report. Subsequently, however, following the directives of the High Court, and also, fearing a backlash in the then impending by-election in a legislative assembly constituency, the government temporarily stalled the pre-acquisition proceedings. A definitive stop came with the Centre refusing to approve the project proposal which was not backed by a comprehensive social and ecological impact assessment. Simultaneously, the Centre managed a political win by introducing its own speed train, the Vande Bharat express, linking the northern and southern ends of the state as conceived in the Silver Line project but without involving fresh acquisition of land or causing any displacement of people as it ran along the existing tracks.

Why did the Silver Line proposal invite such enormous public hostility? The threat of displacement was indeed the foremost factor that triggered the agitation. The negative reaction was related to a host of other issues as well. The estimated cost of the project was a whopping Rs 65,000 crore. It was sought to be met through borrowing, both internal and external. The severely

cash-strapped and indebted government would have had to pass on the formidable burden to the people as higher taxes. The history of earlier development projects in the state, with their steep escalation of cost and time, deepened the pessimism.

Besides, the revenue projections of the Silver Line as made by SYSTRA were suspect. The number of daily passengers was estimated at 80,000. Considering that it was nearly double even that of the Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train that connected two major commercial metros, the projected figure was unrealistic. The government sought to defend the estimate by noting that it was based on the present rail traffic and the potential shift of passengers from road to speed rail. With the Silver Line fare pegged higher than even the premium class in regular trains, the proposed stations located away from the cities, and the standard gauge speed rail tracks devoid of seamless connectivity with the present broad gauge tracks, the projection was a gross exaggeration. The government strove to make a further case for the project by noting that the Japan International Cooperative Agency had offered to fund the project at a low rate of interest. Considering that these loans are invariably tied to procurement of equipment from Japan, most likely, the offer marked an attempt to dump outdated technology as the country was steadily phasing it out and shifting to sophisticated magnetic levitation technology.

Even more disquieting was the possible ecological impact of the project. All those hills, the greenery and the waters cape that a traveller sees in Kerala throw misleading hints on the state's environmental health. Kerala is a severely ecologically fragile land. Through a century and a half, the state has suffered a steady deterioration of forest cover due to the spread of plantation crops and

construction of big dams. Beginning from the 1960s, following the surge in remittances from overseas migrants, the housing and commercial space has kept swelling. While outward migration and demographic transition have resulted in smaller families, the houses have grown bigger. Huge, ugly concrete boxes are a great Keralite obsession. The steep rise in wages, the generosity of migrant relatives, and relatively easy access to loans have enabled even the lower classes to mime the middle and upper classes and build similar, although somewhat smaller but no less ugly, concrete houses. The 'seventies is depicted as a period of 'construction boom' but there has been hardly any slump subsequently. The high density of houses and unbridled consumerism have seen huge malls coming up even in small towns. Innumerable tourist resorts have sprung up, from the seaside to the mountains. The hectic construction activity owing to these and the persistent widening of roads and laying of new roads have led to a vast expansion of built space and swallowed up much of the natural resources like stones, soil, and sand. Consequent to these as also global climate change, in recent years, monsoons in Kerala are attendant with disastrous floods. Shockingly, it was against such a vulnerable landscape that the government had conceived the Silver Line project that involved laying tracks mostly on embankments. The proposed track would have run through the thickly populated coast and the midland, displacing dwellings, damaging wetlands and waterbodies, disrupting fishing, slicing away rice-fields and coconut groves, destroying livelihoods, and, fragmenting neighbourhoods.

Technical experts are of the view that there are much cheaper alternatives for improving the speed and quality of transportation. Their fore-

most recommendation is laying a new, dedicated broad gauge track for speed trains alongside the present broad gauge tracks, instead of going for a stand-alone project cut off from the main lines. Other recommendations include strengthening the existing tracks and straightening the curves and installing automatic signalling systems. All these would involve minimal displacement of dwellings and hardly any serious ecological damage. The investment thereof would be only a tiny fraction of that envisaged for the Silver Line but the revenue much higher.

Clearly, the Silver Line project is economically unviable, environmentally unsustainable, and technologically unimaginative. It would be difficult to believe that the state government is not aware of the serious financial and environmental implications of the project. The decision to go ahead with the project may therefore be explained only in terms of the narrow interests of the ruling classes and the development model it seeks to promote. The ruling classes of contemporary Kerala comprise the CPI(M) party dons, the techno-administrative elite, who are in league

with consultancy firms, and contractors who liaise with the party at different levels. Such development works also tend to benefit the party cadre many of whom are players in a range of economic activities including real-estate, quarrying, sand-mining, and transportation. In a party of beneficiaries rather than comrades, who bothers if the speed rail is ecologically destructive or whether its hefty fare renders it inaccessible to the common people? Projects imposed from above without even a semblance of discussion in the gramasaba has failed to sit comfortably with the party's much-publicised exercise in decentralised planning. Yet, as mega development projects are highly visible and therefore good vote-catchers, these meet with hardly any resistance from the party at large.

The state government now strives to secure the sanction of the union government through intermediaries. Towards this, a veteran speed rail expert who has a close liaison with the Centre and who had contested on a BJP ticket to the state legislative assembly in the last elections has been roped in. Apparently with

the blessings of the Centre, he has prepared a new speed rail proposal which involves higher investment than the Silver Line but is, as the claim goes, less destructive ecologically speaking. Like the earlier one, the new plan envisages laying a new, standard gauge track but it would run mostly on elevated columns and through underground tunnels. Admittedly, under the new plan, much less land would need to be acquired. Erecting concrete columns and building tunnels would still involve extraction of natural resources on a large scale. In contrast with the Silver Line which envisaged buying train sets from abroad, the newly proposed rail would have much less import contents. Given the huge investment and limited potential revenue, however, the revised project too is bound to be financially unsustainable. While ruled by different political parties, supposedly at loggerheads ideologically, it is obvious that the union and the state governments share a similar paradigm of development. Speed rail spells power and money for both.

□□□

PAST IS DEAD, FUTURE IS UNCERTAIN

Continuing Decline of Bengal Economy

Atanu Chakravarty

THERE IS NO DENYING THE fact that West Bengal is an industry-starved state, with the age-old traditional manufacturing industries at their throes, reeling under a plethora of crises. Since 1990s, West Bengal's agrarian economy is facing stagnation. Neither CPM-led Left Front (LF) Government in their 34 years of rule or misrule nor Trinamool Administration for the last three successive terms did anything positive to stem the rot. The much touted political

stability of a particular dispensation in West Bengal could not ensure economic development—be it industry or in agriculture. In 2008, LF represented 234 elected representatives in the 294-strong Assembly House. In the last assembly election Trinamool grabbed 213 seats, registering an all-time high vote of 47.9 percent. A couple of MLAs defected from other parties and joined TMC, thus increasing their tally. But this bountiful electoral harvest and political stability failed to salvage

the sinking economy of the state.

When LF came to power in the state, the industrial situation was grim and they had to inherit a falling industrial economy. According to Debraj Bhattacharya, the new industrial policy of 1978 gave priority to small and cottage industries and sought to curtail the stranglehold of big houses, foreign multinational firms in the organised sector. This policy, on the contrary, failed to revive the industrial climate of the state, and the net result was between 1980 and 1990, in terms of State Domestic Product, West Bengal ranked 13th among Indian States'. (Why the lack of Industry in West Bengal).

Riding on the crest of anti-land acquisition movement at Singur, Nandigram, Mamata Banerjee after assuming state power promised not to forcibly acquire land from the peasantry for the big industrial houses and ironically, like her predecessor, emphasised on small and medium industries as the industrial policy of her Government. The successful land reform programme initiated by the LF Government had limitations within. And when the agrarian impasse stubbornly raised its head, the fruits of cottage industry failed to produce the desired goal, the LF Government ventured recklessly on the paradigm of neo-liberal path of industrialisation that triggered its doomsday. Mamata Banerjee's political compulsion led her to tread a cautious path and according to her, Small and Medium industries were prioritised, boastfully claiming, "We are number one in India in MSME sector". The NITI Aayog study noted that the nature of growth in West Bengal is driven by the unorganised sector. As creation of capital is the most important component of industrial growth, West Bengal lagged in this aspect. According to Annual Survey of Industries (ASI), from 2011 to 2017, the annual average growth rate of the current capital for the firms in the formal sector is negative 0.09 percent in West Bengal. On the other hand, that of net fixed capital is an astounding negative 147 percent. These figures give an indication of a double whammy for the formal sector firms, first in the crisis of creation of retained earnings and secondly a precarious crisis of creation of durable assets. This proves that the registered manufacturing firms in this state is confronting a chronic problem of sustainability as they are failing to add modern machineries and equipments in their assets and losing the

value of their existing plant (West Bengal's Industrial Decline: A Crisis of Capital Creation, Indian Researcher, by editorial team, March 22, 2022).

Jute, the labour intensive traditional industry of the state employs 2.5 lac workers and sustains over 40 lakh families. Out of the 93 mills in India (2006 data) 70 jute mills are in West Bengal, which is the hub of India's Jute Industry, valued at around Rs 10,000 crore.

For the first time, the National Jute Board (NJB), a Central Government organisation, conducted a study for assessing the socio-economic conditions of the Jute Workers of West Bengal and their families to assess the status of their well being and their families.

The survey found that the average income of the workers' Households (HH) is Rs 11,015 per month. However, there is wide variation of income across the HHs. Maximum households (57.4 percent) have reported monthly income in between Rs 5,001 to Rs 10,000 and 6.4 percent HHs have income above Rs. 20,000 per month. On the other hand, 3.8 percent HHs have income below Rs. 5000 per month. An overwhelming 54 percent HHs are in debt. The average amount of loan is Rs39,592 whereas the amount of loan varies from Rs 1,500 (for treatment) to Rs12, 00,000 (for building house, home loan taken from Bank). Social obligation is the most common (35.6%) for taking loan followed by repairing houses (18.1%) and medical care (17.8%). In 78.5 percent cases the loan was taken from PF. Another independent organisation, Wazir Advisors, was engaged by the state government of West Bengal to conduct Primary and Secondary Research on the current scenario of the jute industry. They have found that low wages and laborious work are the

major issues faced by jute workers. The study found, wages in this industry is abysmally low--monthly income of 50-55 percent jute workers hovers around 6,500-7,000 per month. The joining wage of a new entrant is Rs 370, which, the study noted, is lower than the wages received by skilled workers in other industries of the state. Apart from low wages, this industry is plagued by default in the payment of statutory dues for years together. This report also noted, Non-payment of PF and Gratuity is staggering, which has crossed Rs 500 crore. Piling statutory dues are reducing the attractiveness of working in a jute mill. The owners of the jute mills are only interested in maximising their profit within a very short period and are not interested in investing again in the mills. The textile ministry in a report has mentioned that the annual turnover of jute industry is more than Rs 10,000 crore, but data reveals that between 2007-2011 the industry spent Rs 274 crore, a paltry 2.7 percent of its annual turnover on modernisation and technical upgradation. This trend and scenario remained the same in the following years. The owners who mainly hail from Rajasthan and Gujarat are feudal in outlook and treat the state as their colonial possession. Their sole purpose is how quickly to maximise loot at the expense of workers and the industry as well. They hardly bother about development. Also, this industry has been a principal source of generating black money. The British owners, mostly Scottish, built quarters for workers but Indian owners are now dismantling them to make space for multi-storied real estate business. Also, vacant space of jute mills on both sides of the river Hooghly are dotted with a large number of housing projects. There lies easy money.

Jute industry of this state is a symbol of anarchy, lawlessness. No uniform wage pattern, grade- scale is followed by the captains of this industry. Unscrupulous jute traders and bailers turned owners, having shady connections with an influential section of the ruling party during different regimes are ruling the roost which have helped them to thrive in spite of political vicissitudes.

Almost all the trade unions affiliated to different political parties have their functional presence in Jute and Tea, the two most important labour intensive industries in this state. Barring INTTUC, the trade union wing of the ruling party, all trade unions, irrespective of their political affiliation, still follow the fine tradition of united movement in these two industries and charter of demands is submitted before the owners of the Jute and Tea industry unitedly.

Both these two traditional industries are facing similar crises—acute shortage of workforce. Main reason for this persistent malady is abysmal low wages which is not attracting new workers in these industries. The last tripartite industry-wise wage agreement of the jute industry was signed in 2019. That agreement failed to enhance the wages of jute workers and hence all the left trade unions stayed away from renewing that agreement. After expiry of that agreement, a new charter of demand has been submitted before Indian Jute Manufacturers Association (IJMA), state labour department and all the concerned stakeholders in March 2019, but the labour department has failed to settle this wage agreement till date.

In the Tea industry, the last tripartite agreement was signed way back on February 20, 2015, assuring implementation of minimum wage (MW) in the tea sector for the very first time in this 170- year-old scheduled employment. A 27-member MW

Advisory Committee was formed comprising 9 representatives each from the owners, TUs and labour department. The agreement endorsed that the MW calculations should be over by the next 6 months time through a series of parleys amongst stakeholders. The time and terms of agreement ended on March 31, 2017. Meanwhile, more than 20 MWAC meetings have been held since 2015. Wage calculations, both from the employers and the TUs side were placed before the labour department by December 13, 2017. The MIC, Labour out-rightly denied to have received any such formulations in 2018 till date. It remains a fact that the WB Government lacks the political will either to fix the MW in the tea sector or to initiate a tripartite meeting to arrive at negotiated settlement on wages.

On the contrary, the labour department through issuing a series of unilateral government orders increased wages on interim measures amounting to Rs 7 to Rs 10 at a time. The present daily wages for a plucker stands at Rs 232.

To derail and defuse the long standing demands and with an aim to de-consolidate the unity of 26 TUs active in North Bengal tea sector viz. Joint Forum, the latest interim increase has been declared as Rs 18 more, making the daily wages Rs 250 in April 2023. But the employers immediately sought relief before the Hon'ble High Court and could successfully stall the disbursement through a stay order, whose tenure is now extended to July 31, 2023.

The Joint Forum initiated demonstrations before the BL&LRO offices in Terai, Dooars and Hills demanding rights of ownership of the homestead lands within the garden areas (parja-pattas). These demonstrations witnessed spontaneous participation of a large number of

workmen from most of the gardens. The workers, during the demonstrations, also raised slogans expressing their refusal and demanding revocation of Cha Sundari Housing Project 2017 and Tea Tourism Act, 2019. Such projects and acts are primarily meant to evict the workers from their perennial labour line settlements and sell out the garden lands to corporates for the purpose of tea tourism. Several tea garden owners have already earmarked big tracts of garden lands converting them to construct tourist resorts. One such vulgar instance is New Champta Tea Estate (the first ever tea garden in Terai established in 1867), where the Mayfair Group has erected a huge 3-star hotel illegally occupying more than 24 acres of land instead of 5 acres as per the deed. Such structures are also seen in the famed Makaibari Tea Estate in Kurseong hills, in Kamala and Hansqua tea gardens in the Terai region.

The Mamata Banerjee Government is following the footsteps of neo-liberal economy, albeit in a different way. After the Singur episode, she earned the image of anti industry-street fighter and to refurbish her anti- corporate image she promised the industrial house for a bandh-free, strike -free Bengal. Any industrial action, within the permissible legal limit and even against the economic -industrial policies of Modi government were not only discouraged but was mercilessly crushed by the police administration and her trade union wing. During her rule, mandays lost due to strike is zero, while the same due to illegal lockout jumped to an all time high to 100 percent. But none of those lockouts were declared illegal by this government, which eventually encouraged the employers to increase their all out offensive against the workers. Registration of new trade unions under this dispensation

has fallen drastically, thanks to the arbitrary and stringent conditions imposed by the labour department that only augured well to restrict the formation of new unions, albeit in a cunning manner. Thousands and thousands of posts in different departments of state government have been lying vacant for a few decades. Recruiting whopping number of informal employees in formal employment indiscriminately, sans social security and low wages, has become the norm of this government.

West Bengal has the highest number of MSME's—comprising 11 percent of the country's total. These predominantly informal sectors, ac-

counting for more than 95 percent of the total manufacturing firms in the state, are neither registered by the government nor have access to institutional credits. Approximately 93 percent of the total workers are employed in these sectors and are beyond the pale of labour laws. According to the periodic labour force survey (2019), 52 percent of the non-farm sectors are home based and 95 percent are working with less than 6 workers.

A defining feature of West Bengal's agriculture is two-third of all rural households (65.2%) own no land, as per the latest round of National Family Health Survey 5, 2019-21. De-peasantisation and sub-

sequent proletarianisation is the present feature. As agriculture has failed to absorb labour, millions of young labouring youth are migrating to other states and a considerable section is fetching their fortune in the construction sector, which is almost driven entirely by casual labour, whereas more than half of the workforce engaged in manufacturing and services is self-employed.

Organising the nameless and faceless informal workers who are everywhere, for living wages, decent work, safe and better working conditions, social security, giving special emphasis on the working women are the challenges before the trade union movement of West Bengal. □□□

A NEW INITIATIVE

D D Kosambi Research Foundation

Kobad Ghandy

TODAY MOVEMENTS FOR social change, both in India and abroad, have reached a dead end. There is need for some fresh thinking as to how one can change society in a direction which is more humane and just. If steps are not taken now, people are headed for a dystopian future as outlined by Klaus Schwab, founder and head of the World Economic Forum, in his book on *The Great Reset*. This chief agent of the billionaire club says in his book “at least 4 billion ‘useless eaters’ will be eliminated by the year 2050 through limited wars, organised epidemics, through fatal fast-acting diseases and starvation. Energy, food and water shall be kept at subsistence levels for the non-elite... until the world’s population reaches a manageable level of 1 billion... From the time there shall be artificially contrived food, and water shortages and medical care to remind the masses that their very existence depends on the Commit-

tee of the 300”. Earlier there was empathy for the poor and oppressed, now these pillars of the establishment, like Schwab, Harari, Gates, etc have the audacity to call them ‘useless eaters’. That too without batting an eye-lid. Further, worse than Hitler, they call, de facto, for their gradual extermination.


And this is not science fiction; they are serious about their project and the first step in that direction was the world lockdown in the name of the pandemic (maybe the ‘organised epidemic’ that he talks of). The serious world economic crisis that haunts the world today suggests similar holocausts are to come. Schwab’s comrade, Bill Gates, threatened a far more deadly virus is due.

So, one has to act, and act fast, if people are to save themselves and stem their planned agenda. The trouble is that most liberals and even the left live in their isolated world oblivious to the real dangers

facing it. Cocoon-like they repeat outdated formulas which numb the masses to the real dangers facing them. The proposal to set up the D D Kosambi Research Foundation and Library is only one such project of the numerous new initiatives necessary in the current situation to find solutions that can understand current phenomenon better to help stem the rot. The library will be set up at Howrah/Kolkata and the Foundation will function from Maharashtra with branches in many states bringing out studies and papers in English, Bengali, Tamil, Konkani and other languages. Kosambi, after all, lived and taught in Pune, though originally from Goa. Aptly this Research Foundation is being established in the month that Kosambi was born (July 31, 1907) and died (June 29 1966).

This Foundation derives its name from the great polymath and progressive thinker of the 1950s and 1960s. This Foundation dedicates itself to this great scholar and seeks to use the same spirit in the search for truth and justice. The Foundation is being set up to research/study the varied socio-economic aspects of the

মানস ভট্টাচার্য



বিক্রম
নায়ারের
সঙ্গে
তিন দশক

বামপন্থী সাংবাদিক বিক্রম নায়ারের আকর্ষণীয়
ব্যক্তিত্বের স্মৃতি-আলেখ্য। নির্মাণ করেছেন নায়ারের
সহকর্মী ও শাগরেদ মানস ভট্টাচার্য।
অসংখ্য ঘটনা ও চরিত্রের ভিড়ে ঠাসা এই মেদুর ও
মুখর পাঁচালী পাওয়া যাচ্ছে কলেজ স্ট্রিটের দে বুক
স্টোর, ধ্যানবিন্দু ও লালন-এ
এছাড়াও পাবেন **FRONTIER** অফিসে,
44 বলরাম দে স্ট্রিট, কলকাতা 700006
ফোন **8240016324**
ডাক ও অনলাইনে পেতে যোগাযোগ করুন
9064034932 নম্বরে (লালন)
বই সংক্রান্ত যেকোন বিষয়ে যোগাযোগ করুন
9432015501 নম্বরে।
প্রচ্ছদ সোমনাথ ঘোষ
স্কেচ হিরণ মিত্র
প্রকাশক আক্ষরিক
দাম ₹ **250.00**

society—both at the India-level and at the international plane. Its focus will be to study varied narratives to try and discover the root causes for the ills of the society to create a more humane world.

While trying to promote a scientific temper it will seek to publish research papers, in-depth articles, books and periodicals, based on the findings and information gathered through research, surveys, in-depth investigations, interviews, etc. While the topics can cover a wide arch, ranging from issues like science for the people, mathematics, engineering, etc its focus will be more on the socio-economic life of the country—including issues of Brahminism/caste/patriarchy at the social plane and aspects of underdevelopment of the country at the economic plane; their reasons and solution. All this will be

done in the context of the world situation and the worsening crisis of the imperialist system.

It shall, in addition, seek to understand/study climate change and destruction of the environment worldwide and in India and its impact on the flora and fauna of India and the world.

It shall also seek to understand man and his environment in the context of his/her increasing alienation, commodification, resulting in epic levels of insecurities, isolation, depression and social retrogression—through studies/critiques in the latest in philosophy, psychology and bio-technology.

The Foundation will tap talent from all fields of academics/researchers/activists and seek donations to be able to accomplish these tasks ignored by mainstream scholars and

institutions. It welcomes students, teachers/academics, research scholars throughout India and even internationally—in fact, anyone/anywhere seriously interested in getting to the truth behind all phenomena—to either join the foundation and/or send in papers. It will give scholarships/stipends to young academics for specific projects as and when the funds become available.

It will start a web page and invites all to send their proposals there. In the immediate it invites all to write in at the following email address research.kosambi@gmail.com and suggest which topics they are interested in researching. Donations to the Foundation can be given in cash or sent on-line once the Foundation is registered as a Society and a bank account opened.

□□□

AN INTELLECTUAL PURSUIT

Ranajit Guha, Subaltern School and Anthropology in India

Abhijit Guha

THE RECENT DEMISE OF Ranajit Guha, (1923–2023) the legendary icon of Indian historiography prompted a flurry of news items, obituaries and personal memoirs in the media. More will come in the future. This was obvious and natural owing to Guha's monumental, unorthodox and challenging contributions in the writing of Indian history, which was often regarded as 'revolutionary' by his co-workers and disciples who built up the 'subaltern school' with their shining brilliance.

Partha Chatterjee, a renowned political scientist of India and also, one of the chief collaborators of Ranajit Guha described the objectives of the subaltern school in his article in the International Encyclo-

pedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences in a lucid language:

The objective of subaltern historiography was to oppose the two elitisms. The field of modern South Asian history was dominated in the 1970s by a debate between a group of historians principally located in Cambridge, UK, and another based mainly in Delhi, India. The former argued that Indian nationalism was a bid for power by a handful of Indian elites who used the traditional bonds of caste and communal ties to mobilize the masses against British rule. The latter spoke of how the material conditions of colonial exploitation created the ground for an alliance of the different classes in Indian society and how a nationalist leadership inspired and organised the

masses to join the struggle for national freedom. Guha argued that both these views were elitist—the former representing a colonial elitism and the latter a nationalist elitism. Both assumed that nationalism was wholly a product of elite action. Neither history had any place for the independent political actions of the subaltern classes (Chatterjee: 2001: 15237-15241).

By thoroughly opposing the elitist views of Indian historiography, the subalternists led by Guha discovered new historical sources and through a rereading of the existing archives had shown that the subaltern classes were not always being manipulated by the elites but raised their own voices. The real task for the historian, therefore, was to record and write about how the socially underprivileged groups lived their lives and specially, protested against the colonial rulers. Unsurprisingly, the philosophy of the subaltern school was closely allied with the anti-colonial, Marxist and left-wing po-

litical ideology of India in particular and South Asia in general. One should not forget that the subalternists were post-colonial scholars studying colonial past and the then anti-colonial struggles, but by the very nature of their discipline they had no onus to take part in the present process of nation-building in the post-independence period. Writing a subaltern history was purely an intellectual pursuit.

THE TRAGEDY OF INDIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

Unlike historians, the post-colonial anthropologists of India by the very nature of the objective and methodology of their discipline had to record the *world-of-everyday-life* of the subalterns, the tribes, the low-ranked castes and other socially underprivileged groups living in the vast rural areas of India. From the very beginning, the task of the anthropologist in India was never a search for pure knowledge. Anthropology was always a practical project. During the colonial period the census data on the tribes and castes were collected to serve the Empire and this tradition was continued in the post-colonial period by the Anthropological Survey of India, the largest governmental organisation of the anthropologists in India (Guha 2017:23-25). The earliest anthropology department at the University of Calcutta was also established during the colonial period, which largely followed the British pedagogy. With the independence of the country, the practical objectives of anthropology changed and remarkable studies were being done by some of the pioneering anthropologists, which were directed towards better planning for the economic improvement and social emancipation of the subalterns affected by famine, resettlement and displacement caused by big dams and industries (Guha 2022). Despite these few remark-

able studies on the subalterns, the self-reflection of the anthropologists in post-colonial India was quite pessimistic. In the same decade when Ranajit Guha and his associates began to write on the subaltern voice in history, an Indian social anthropologist and sociologist Jaganath Pathy critiqued anthropology in general and third world development anthropology in particular for serving the colonial and imperial powers ((Pathy 1981:623-627). I quote Pathy:

In the pursuit, the anthropologists should shed their value-neutrality and stop opposing large scale changes. The need is to transform anthropology from being an instrument of domination of the oppressors to becoming an instrument of liberation of the oppressed (Pathy 1981:627).

Pathy, however made no attempt to show how social anthropology or anthropology during the post-colonial era could be put to use in a truly nationalist spirit to serve the interests of the oppressed by transcending itself from the colonial hangover. In fact, long before Pathy's article, a standard critique of Indian anthropology had already grown by the Indian anthropologists themselves. The critics, in a self-reflective manner opined that Indian anthropology was the product of a colonial tradition and the Indian anthropologists for various reasons followed their colonial and neo-colonial masters in one way or the other. I arrange the critiques of Indian anthropology in a chronological manner from 1952-1997.

A CHRONOLOGY OF THE CRITIQUES OF INDIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

1. As early as 1952 one of the doyens of Indian anthropology, Nirmal Kumar Bose in a significant article published in *Man in India* enumerated the research

projects undertaken by the Department of Anthropology, (the former name of the Anthropological Survey of India) and the anthropology departments at Calcutta, Madras, Lucknow, Delhi, Gauhati and Osmania universities. Bose's investigation was exhaustive and based on written replies from the Heads of the aforementioned institutions. After reviewing the overall scenario he concluded:

There does not seem to be any problem which Indian anthropologists have made peculiarly their own. Anthropology in our country have, on the whole, followed the tracks beaten by anthropologists in the more powerful countries of the West. What they do, we generally try to repeat on the Indian soil (Bose 1952:133).

Bose however ended with the positive note that there were exceptions to the above generalisation and if Indian anthropologists could work independently on Indian problems, there was still sign of hope. Just after 10 years, N K Bose published another article 'Researches in Indian anthropology' in the same journal in which he turned the attention of the readers from applied to 'certain fundamental problems in anthropology' and mentioned the researches done by the social anthropologists on the persistence of the caste system. Along with this, Bose mentioned the anthropometric surveys carried out by the physical anthropologists at the all-India level as another type of fundamental research and he found young anthropologists at the Anthropological Survey of India as 'first-class workers' (Bose 1962:179).

2. After Bose, his famous student Surajit Sinha in his insightful article published in the *Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society* in 1971 observed that

despite considerable growth in research publications and professional human power in social and cultural anthropology during the last 100 years, the Indian anthropologists largely remained dependent on western and colonial traditions (Sinha 1971: 1-14). In continuation of his pertinent examination of the colonial dependence of Indian anthropology, Sinha contributed a full chapter entitled 'India: A Western Apprentice' in a book, *Anthropology: Ancestors and Heirs*, edited by the Marxist anthropologist Stanley Diamond in 1980 published by Mouton. In that article Sinha discussed 'the process of naturalisation of the different strands of Western anthropological traditions' and finally ended with a pessimistic note:

For some time, the proliferation of trained manpower, random efforts at catching up with the latest developments in the West and a general increase in the number of publications will characterise the development of Indian anthropology (Sinha 1980: 281).

Trained by both Nirmal Kumar Bose and Tarak Chandra Das and also at a later stage by Robert Redfield, Sinha was exposed to a wide arena of global and national anthropology. He completed his major works on the relationship between tribe and caste in the context of Indian civilisation as well as state formation by mid 1960s. A closer view of his published works revealed that he first presented the critical idea on Indian anthropology in a Wenner-Gren Foundation conference held in New York in 1968 (Sinha 1968). In fact, Sinha's self-critical views on the growth of Indian social science in general and anthropology and sociology in particular could be traced back to his article entitled 'Involvement in social change: a plea for

own ideas' published in the radical social science journal *Economic and Political Weekly* as early as 1967 (Sinha 1967:1707-1709). In this article Sinha stated quite categorically:

A scholarly tradition of leaning heavily, if not abjectly, on ideas borrowed from the West is growing in this country. This is clear from the post-independence writings of a large number of Indian social scientists and the research policies of some of our modern research institutions. The borrowed ideas and concepts, when accepted uncritically, obscure the major issues involved in planned social change and stand in the way of posing the right kind of questions in the study of social change (Ibid 1707).

Sinha pursued this critique of Indian social science by converging his attack on Indian anthropology in the subsequent articles. Taking note of his earlier article in the JIAS, Sinha in his 'Foreword' of the precious book *Bibliographies of Eminent Indian Anthropologists* (1974) written by Shyamal Kumar Ray made a remark:

...there was a general reluctance among Indian scholars to take due note of the research publications of Indian pioneers and contemporaries. As a result, research endeavours of Indian scholars tend to be derivative, leaving the responsibilities of breaking new grounds exclusively to western scholars (Sinha 1974: iii).

Although Sinha praised N K Bose and T C Das at the individual levels for their insight and ethnography respectively, the critiques advanced by Sinha in his 1967, 1971 and 1980 articles on the overall achievement of Indian anthropology was quite pessimistic and distressing. For him, there was hardly any sign of an independent, let alone nationalist Indian anthropology. In his ar-

ticle entitled 'Urgent Problems for Research in Social and Cultural Anthropology in India: Perspectives and Suggestions' published in *Sociological Bulletin* in 1968 Sinha identified three distinct social anthropological 'vantage points' to approach the urgent problems in India, which were: (i) study of 'Primitive Groups' of tribes, (ii) study of human groups for the theoretical understanding of Indian society and (iii) anthropological study of problems urgently needed for national reconstruction and development. Curiously, Sinha left the third area untouched for the purpose of the paper (Sinha 1968:123-131). It was not clear why he had done so and what purpose prevented him to undertake discussion on this vital area. More interestingly, few years later, Sinha wrote in the Foreword of the book *Bibliographies of eminent Indian Anthropologists*:

We are also impressed by the fact that these pioneering scholars, often working under severe limitations of resources, were engaged in life-long endeavour in their particular areas of academic interest. Each of them demonstrated a rare quality of mental independence while living most of their lives under colonial rule (Sinha 1974: iii).

Surajit Sinha never came up with a comprehensive and overall review of the results of the 'mental independence' of his predecessors who lived their 'lives under colonial rule'. He seemed to satisfy himself only with the praise of N K Bose and occasionally T C Das.

3. Celebrated Social Anthropologist and Sociologist André Bêteille in one of his articles published in *Sociological Bulletin* in 1997 wrote:

In India, each generation of sociologists seems eager to start its work on a clean slate, with

*With Best
Compliments
From*

Asis Ranjan Sengupta

little or no attention to the work done before. This amnesia about the work of their predecessors is no less distinctive of Indian sociologists than their failure to innovate (Béteille 1997:98).

Béteille's observation on Indian sociologists however, was not novel. Long before his pronouncement, N K Bose and Surajit Sinha critiqued Indian anthropologists almost in the same manner, which I have already mentioned.

WHY THE SUBALTERN SCHOOL NEEDS MORE ANTHROPOLOGY?

The factual description of the critiques, which I have made in the previous section, is a partial one. The other side of the story is also generally overlooked by the historians and Indian anthropologists. This is the story of the subaltern historians' due recognition of the contribution of anthropology, and none other than Ranajit Guha and Partha Chatterjee were the forerunners. The narrative began with the publication of a foreword by Ranajit Guha of a significant book entitled *An Anthropologist among the Historians and other essays* (1987) by a renowned American anthropologist, Bernard Cohn, who did his intensive field-work among the untouchable castes (the Chamars) in a village of Uttar Pradesh as early as in the 1950s. Bernard Cohn in his seminal essays published first in 1962 and then in the 1980s developed ideas about the relationship between the 'field' of the anthropologist and the 'archive' of the historian. (Cohn 1987). Cohn wrote in one of his important papers in the collection *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*:

The diagnostic work place of the historians and anthropologists, the field and the archive, contrast with respect to the differing modes of comprehension

each represents.... The past exists not only in records of the past, but survives in buildings, objects and landscapes of the present day, the observation of which assists the historian in constructing the context. The anthropological historian therefore should have the working experience of both the field and the archive (Cohn 1987:18-49).

Cohn viewed archives as 'cultural artifacts', which were created by none other than human beings and accordingly, historians and anthropologists often interpenetrate archive and the field in many interesting ways, and he mainly studied the colonial archives in India. Ranajit Guha in the 'Introduction' to Cohn's aforementioned book located anthropological research within the post Second World War period:

Since the end of the Second World War it is anthropology, rather than history, which has led the revolt against the mutual segregation of the two disciplines within the domain of South Asian Studies. Cohn was not the only rebel; he was one of a number of scholars whose writings showed unmistakable signs of a rapprochement in this respect (Guha 1987: vii-xxvi).

Apart from the important contributions of 'writing history from below' which corresponded with the ethnographer's attempt to grasp 'the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world' the subaltern approach signalled a closer connection between anthropologists and the archive, the latter itself becoming increasingly understood as a valid ethnographic site (Mathur 2000:89-106; Comaroff & Comaroff 1992; Ortner 1984:126-166; Guha 1987). The subaltern advance, however, suffered its setback within thirty years, which of course was not a very short period of

longevity for a school of thought. Among others, one of the reasons for the setback was its lack of touch with real people on the ground. Subaltern theorists were moving from one interesting archive to another, from one set of text to another set to construct their meta-narratives of anti-elitist historiography and finally losing the practice of the people in their day-to-day world-of-everyday-life. Partha Chatterjee, one of the core contributors of this genre admitted:

As an intellectual project, Subaltern Studies was perhaps overdetermined by its times. Given today's changed contexts the tasks set out by it cannot be taken forward within the framework and methods mobilised for it. Subaltern Studies was a product of its time; another time calls for other projects (Chatterjee 2012:44-49).

What were the new projects visualized by Chatterjee? Interestingly, he observed that a more recent trend in the social science disciplines was to study the practice of the people rather than the texts which recorded the past or the present practice. In his words again:

We must also note the more recent trend in several disciplines to move away from texts to the study of practices. Led by anthropologists, this move highlights the autonomous status of embodied or institutional practices whose significance cannot simply be read off texts describing the underlying concepts. Thus, religious ritual is not necessarily an instantiation of a theological concept or dogma; the practice may be performed without the subject subscribing to, or perhaps even being aware of, the underlying religious concept (Chatterjee 2012:49).

More than a decade ago, in an extensive review of subaltern studies

and the relationship between History and Anthropology, K. Sivaramakrishnan noted the importance of anthropological methodology of putting texts in their specific spatial contexts:

Therefore, the subalternists' contribution to the convergence of history and anthropology is important. Resorting to anthropology and history from below can recover partial and hidden histories but it is not enough to juxtapose these fugitive accounts with master narratives and their exalted claims to total knowledge. The subaltern story may lose its punch if not situated in context (Sivaramakrishnan 1995:395-429).

In recent years the conjunction between history and anthropology became more pronounced in the writings of Brian Axel and Saurabh Dube. (Axel 2002 & Dube 2004 & 2007). Both Axel and Dube envisioned new unities between history and anthropology, archive and ethnography, synchronic and diachronic in their historical anthropology and more importantly, both have viewed power relations in colonial and post-colonial times as key elements in their project.

Significantly, following the trails of Cohn and the subalterns, some of the anthropologists who utilised the archives as cultural artifacts in India have put their major thrust on the annals created by the British colonialists, rather than the practices of the people in any specific locale. Notable examples of the archive genre are the series of works done by Nicholas Dirks on the colonial times of India (Dirks 2001). Important anthropological studies which juxtaposed field and governmental archives on post-colonial state in India however have also emerged in the recent years. In this connection, one may note that

Surajit Sinha in a significant paper written as early as 1959 studied the social movements among the Bhumij community in the then Bihar (presently Jharkhand) by using colonial as well as post-colonial archival data along with his own field.

In sum, Ranajit Guha's early pronouncement on the reunion of anthropology and history and Partha Chatterjee's recent caution to subaltern historians' over-emphasis to archive rather than looking at the real people on the ground as had been done by the anthropologists, is gradually looming large over the academic horizon. The sooner the subalternists in India put them into action may be a better option. □□□

References

- Axel, B. (Ed.). (2002). *From the margins: Historical Anthropology and its Futures*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Béteille, A. (1997). Newness in Sociological Enquiry. *Sociological Bulletin*. 46(1): 97-110.
- Bose, N.K. (1952). Current research projects in Indian anthropology. *Man in India*, 32(2): 121-133.
- Bose, N.K. (1962). Researches in Indian anthropology. *Man in India*, 42(3): 175-180.
- Chatterjee, P. (2001). Subaltern History. In *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*. 2001, pp. 15237-15241 (2nd edition 2015) <https://doi.org/10.1016/B0-08-043076-7/02645-0> (accessed on 04/05/2023).
- Chatterjee, P. (2012). After subaltern studies. *Economic and Political Weekly*. XLVII: 44-49.
- Cohn, B. (1987). An anthropologist among the historians; a field study. In Bernard S. Cohn *An Anthropologist among the Historians*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Cohn, B. (1987). History and Anthropology: the state of play. In Bernard S. Cohn *An Anthropologist among the Historians*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Comaroff J, Comaroff J. (1992). *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Dirks, N. (2001). *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Dube, S. (2004). *Post-colonial passages: Contemporary history-writing on India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Guha, A. (2017). The empire, its law and the bankruptcy of anthropologists. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 52(36): 23-25.
- Guha, A. (2022). *Nation-building in Indian Anthropology: Beyond the Colonial Encounter*. New Delhi: Manohar.
- Guha, R. (1987). Introduction. In Bernard S. Cohn *An Anthropologist among the Historians*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Mathur, S. (2000). History and Anthropology in South Asia: Rethinking the Archive. *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 29: 89-106.
- Pathy, J. (1981). Imperialism, Anthropology and the third world. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 16(14): 623-627.
- Ortner S. (1984). Theory in anthropology since the sixties. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. 26(1):126-66.
- Sinha, S. (1959). Bhumij-Kshatriya Social Movement in South Manbhum. *Bulletin of the Department of Anthropology*. Calcutta University. VII(2): 9-32.
- Sinha, S. (1967). Involvement in social change: a plea for own ideas. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2 (37):1707-1709.
- Sinha, S. (1968). Urgent Problems for Research in Social and Cultural Anthropology in India: Perspective and Suggestions. *Sociological Bulletin*. 17 (2):123-131.
- Sinha, S. (1971). Is there an Indian tradition in social/cultural anthropology: retrospect and prospect? *Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society*. 6:1-14.
- Sinha, S. (1974). 'Foreword'. In *Bibliographies of Eminent Indian Anthropologists (WITH LIFE-SKETCHES)* By Shyamal Kumar Ray. Anthropological Survey of India, Govt. of India, Indian Museum, Calcutta.
- Sinha, S. (1980). India: A Western apprentice. In *Anthropology: Ancestors and Heirs*. Edited by Stanley Diamond. The Hague: Mouton.
- Sivaramakrishnan, K. (1995). Situating the subaltern: History and Anthropology in the subaltern studies project. *Journal of Historical Sociology*. 8(4): 395-429.

Acknowledgements

I owe my debts to Partha Chatterjee and Ramchandra Guha for first inspiring me through 'Dumont Sociology Study Group' at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences Kolkata during 1983-84 on this subject.

ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE

Jaduguda Uranium Mining Cluster

Bernard D'Mello

ADIVASIS (LITERALLY, “ORIGINAL inhabitants”, equivalent to “indigenous peoples”) have been and are being sacrificed in the union government’s uranium mining and processing projects in what is now the State of Jharkhand, earlier the State of Bihar, where the public enterprise, Uranium Corporation of India Ltd (UCIL) began underground uranium mining and processing plant, twenty-four km west of Jaduguda, in 2003; Bagjata, 25 km east of Jaduguda, processing operations at Jaduguda in East Singhbhum in 1967. Then at Bhatin, three km away from Jaduguda; followed by Narwapahar, twelve km north-west of Jaduguda, in 1995; then the Turamdih mine and commissioned in 2008; Banduhurang, UCIL’s first open pit mine, adjacent to the Turamdih mine, in 2009; and Mohuldih, 27 km north-west of Jaduguda, in 2012. The Jaduguda mine and these subsequently developed mines, together with the two uranium processing plants, constitute what may be called the Jaduguda uranium mining cluster (in short, the Jaduguda cluster), ensuring economies of scale and scope. The communities in and around this cluster have been mainly composed of Santals, Hos, Mundas, Araons, and other Adivasis who have been bearing the brunt—the disparate impacts and disproportionate burdens—of dispossession, displacement, and radioactive contamination over the last five decades.

Uranium mining and processing—producing uranium oxide (U₃O₈) concentrate called *yellowcake* and some fifteen hundred to two-thousand times the yellowcake quantity

of residual material or tailings—constitute the initial step of the process of production of nuclear weapons that culminates in their final assembly and storage, with serious health and environmental hazards at each step. And, of course, from the yellowcake, what becomes the fuel for the nuclear power plants. With India joining the ranks of “near nuclear and de facto nuclear weapons countries”, like Israel, following its testing of a nuclear weapon in 1974, one can reasonably surmise that the yellowcake from the Jaduguda cluster has been (and is) used as the basic raw material for the making of not merely the fuel for nuclear power plants but weapons-grade plutonium for nuclear weapons.

Any guess then why vital information required to throw light on the environmental and human distress in and around the Jaduguda cluster has been withheld. More so because of the government’s culture of secrecy, enshrined in the colonial Official Secrets Act, 1923—independent India’s anti-Freedom of Information Act—that has stifled the quality of work of independent journalists and scholars in matters that are deemed to have a bearing on “National Security”. Indeed, even information on UCIL’s annual capacity in metric tons of the U₃O₈ concentrate or its actual production is not in the public realm. Wonder how the Right to Information Act, 2005 would help, given that information deemed to have a bearing on Intelligence and Security is virtually excluded from its purview.

India’s nuclear establishment has been engaged in “self-regulation”

under the Atomic Energy Act, 1962, which assigns the responsibility to the central government, and so, when the Atomic Energy Regulation Board (AERB) was formed in 1983, it was placed under the Department of Atomic Energy, which also had (and has) the UCIL under its wing. The AERB claims that it reviews the safety of the Jaduguda cluster of uranium mines and processing, conducts regulatory inspections and enforcements, as per the “provisions of the Atomic Energy (Radiation Protection) Rules, 2004, [and] also enforces [the] industrial safety aspects under the Factories Act, 1948 and the Atomic Energy (Factories) Rules, 1996”. But it seems to have chosen to focus more on issuing guidelines and directives for self-regulation, and formulating rules promulgated by the central government on radiation related safety in uranium mining and processing, safe disposal of radioactive wastes, working of the mines, handling of “prescribed substances” (uranium), and so on.

Surely the AERB has been aware of the specific problems related to land acquisition, uprooting, and rehabilitation/resettlement that have been faced by the adversely affected Adivasi communities. Notices for the takeover of lands have at times been served under the Atomic Energy Act, dispensing with state government permission. The proximity of drinking water sources to the tailings, the latter turned into a slurry in the event of heavy rains, overflowing, and contaminating adjacent agricultural fields, streams, and the Subarnarekha River. Indeed, in the early years of mine and processing operations, the tailings were said to have just been piled in unlined pits, from where they most likely leached into groundwater and ran off into surface water.

It was only somewhat later that

proper tailing ponds were built. Some of the tailing ponds reportedly still remain near where Adivasi communities reside. Pipeline ruptures or bursts in 1981, 2006, 2008, 2011, and 2014 near tailing ponds have discharged radioactive sludge. Probable elevated lung cancer rates among contract workers from inhaling radon gas particles is not unfounded, for these workers have not been protected as much as the regular workers of UCIL, and their radiation exposures have not been documented, for they do not have access to the medical care that the regular workers of UCIL have been entitled to. Most likely, these workers have been underground miners and haulers assigned the most dangerous jobs in close proximity with the uranium ore and its decay products. Probable deaths of contract worker after contract worker from undiagnosed cancer or other serious occupational hazards are not unfounded. This section of workers, especially the Adivasi ones, have been kept in abysmal ignorance and deliberately deceived.

The local water consumed by the Adivasi communities has been contaminated with radium levels much higher than the drinking water standard. It was only after mobilisation of the Adivasi local communities by the Jharkhandi Organisation of Struggling Humans (JOSH) and the Turamdih Visthapit Samiti (TVS, Association of the Turamdih Uprooted People) in 2018 that the company made available treated water through water tankers (irregularly though) outside the company colonies. Water contamination, however, continues to adversely affect the outer-circle, poor Adivasi and other communities. In general, mitigation measures have been least likely to be implemented for these communities, and anyway, UCIL has not bothered to even try to

restore the water sources of the local Adivasi communities to pre-mining conditions.

Although there reportedly is some evidence of the adverse health effects of consuming contaminated fish in the Jaduguda cluster, this does not seem to have been properly documented, although Dumkar Murmu, the founder of Jharkhandi Organisation Against Radiation (JOAR), in an interview in 2017, speaks about it, and of “mutations in the fish, [and] the congenital deformities in livestock” in the late 1990s. UCIL has, of course, employed the Adivasis as workers, one non-permanent job per displaced household, and a vast number of displaced Adivasis have been employed by UCIL’s contractors in mining and processing, and this has been an important source of livelihood. Indeed, most workers at the mining and processing sites are contract labourers getting lower wages, with no medical care, no retirement benefits when they are no longer needed, nor eligibility for UCIL employee colony housing, and no access for their children to UCIL run schools. Compensation for displacement has practically been only through employment, and this has kept many an Adivasi household from starvation.

Given UCIL’s poor, ground-level environmental record, no wonder it takes recourse to undemocratic tactics at the “public hearings” conducted by the Jharkhand State Pollution Control Board (JSPCB) for environmental clearance of proposed mining projects or expansion of existing mines and processing plants. For instance, for one such public hearing in 2004, for the Banduhurang mining project,

“UCIL decided to use strong arm tactics to put down dissent. They brought in the para-military Rapid Action Force, armed

with AK-47s [and] dressed in battle gear, besides the state police and the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), and notorious mafia members from [the Tata Steel town of nearby] Jamshedpur. ...[But] the frightened Adivasis had to voice their feelings about giving up their lands and livelihoods for the project. The chairman of the JSPCB failed to act impartially and manipulated the meeting in such a way that those who opposed the project were not allowed to speak. [But] Despite the show of muscle and steel there was a strong voice of opposition at the hearing”.

At another such public hearing, in May 2009 for environmental clearance for the expansion of mining and processing at Jaduguda, UCIL

“employees and their families crowded out the affected villagers. The venue was surrounded by armed and baton-wielding police and the CISF, creating a repressive atmosphere. ...the ‘public’ who have lost their lands and whose health has been damaged due to radiation could find no place [at the meeting]. ...[However, at] a dharna just outside the fence surrounding the venue ...Ghanashyam Biruli [Birulee], a local villager and president of JOAR, put forward the villagers’ demands ...[which included making] an independent study of the environmental and health impact of the UCIL’s operations in Jaduguda, [and monitoring] the water bodies to ensure that the radionuclides do not seep into the aquifer used by more than 1,00,000 people. ... [JOAR also pointed out to the JSPCB that] places like the Jaduguda colony, NarwaPahar colony where the impact of radiation is relatively less were

surveyed while the villages of Tilaitand, Chatikocha, Dungridih and others that are among the worst affected were deliberately left out”.

The adverse health effects of the environmental hazards posed by uranium mining and processing have most probably been experienced on a significant scale, and the local Adivasis have suffered the adverse effects firsthand, as lived experience. Moreover, the toxic and radiation risks are unique in terms of duration – they are *longue durée*. And there was a long, assertive movement against the opening of the Turamdih mine and processing plant, led by the TVS, cognisant of the environmental hazards and health effects. Sample, however, what UCIL has to say to exonerate itself and the central government for the adverse health effects from the uranium mines and processing –that the

“... radiation level in and around Jaduguda is much below the limit as prescribed by Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) and International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP). ...The various studies carried out by experts have proved beyond doubt that the diseases prevalent in the villages around UCIL workings are not due to radiation but attributed to malnutrition, malaria and unhygienic living conditions etc. A full-fledged Environmental Survey Laboratory cum Health Physics Unit – an independent body under the administrative control of Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) is in operation since inception to carry out environmental and radiological surveillance in and around UCILs units. ...Statistical data at regular intervals reveal no significant effect on ground and surface water bodies

due to UCIL activities. Similarly, up-take studies on more than thirty species of different groups (plant & animal) show that there is no significant change in background radiation due to UCIL operation.

...On the suggestion of the Environment Committee of the Legislative Council of Bihar (the then State), a health survey of all the residents within 2 km of UCIL was jointly undertaken by a medical team comprising doctors from Bihar Government and UCIL in the year 1998. ...The medical survey by specialists did not identify any patient suffering from radiation related diseases.

...health records maintained at UCIL Hospital show that the various ailment like TB, Congenital Malformation, Cancer etc. in and around Jaduguda are much less than the national average...

...UCIL has obtained ISO 9001:2000 certification for Quality Assurance, ISO 14001:2004 certification for Environmental Management System and IS-18001:2000 certification for Occupational Health and Safety Management System. It reflects the commitment of the company towards safe and environment-friendly operations in all its existing and upcoming projects...

...Under the Environmental Protection Act, 1986 Public Hearing is conducted by the State Pollution Control Board (SPCB) prior to commissioning of different projects. [The] ...standard regulatory procedure laid down in Environment Protection Act 1986 for conducting Public Hearing by the SPCB ...is strictly followed.

This “scientific” propaganda is a sad reflection on the scientific temper of a section of the scientific and

technological personnel in the employ of the central government, some of the scientific institutions under the Department of Atomic Energy, including the AERB, and the UCIL. These scientific personnel do not seem to be concerned about or even bother to consider the lived experience of the Adivasi and oppressed caste people in and around the Jaduguda cluster over the last five decades. They seem to have vetted the propaganda more like public relations professionals than men or women of science. Contrast these scientists and doctors as stenographers of power with two ordinary Adivasi villagers, Ghanshyam Birulee and Dumka Murmu, the former, president of JOAR, the latter, one of its founders (as mentioned above):

“In Jadugoda, the community began to notice something was amiss in the early 1980s. Ghanshyam Birulee’s father, a uranium miner for UCIL, was stricken with lung cancer and died suddenly in 1984. And then his mother, inexplicably, also contracted lung cancer and passed away in 1995. Birulee, who belongs to the Ho Adivasi community, explained that he understood his father’s death from lung cancer as being directly linked to his work in the uranium mines. But no one could understand why his mother, who had never set foot in the mines, would also contract lung cancer. After consulting with public health scientists, Birulee determined that his mother’s laundering of his father’s uniforms, caked with uranium dust, likely triggered her cancer. But Birulee, and his counterpart, fellow Adivasi rights activist Dumkar Murmu, had more than a health crisis on their hands. Adivasi loss of land and agriculture due

to UCIL's expansion spurred them to found the Jharkhand Adivasi Visthapit Berojgar Sangh (JAVBS, Jharkhandi Displaced Unemployed Union) in 1994. ...In 1998, in the wake of India's second nuclear weapons tests in the Pokhran Desert, Birulee and Murmu joined a yatra walk from Pokhran, Rajasthan, to Sarna, Punjab, to protest India's embrace of nuclear weapons. Many yatra travellers opposed nuclear weapons but embraced nuclear energy, and this rationalisation was troubling for Murmu and Birulee. The more they learned about radiation, the stronger their convictions became: both peaceful and martial uses of nuclear technology would accelerate Adivasi suffering. In either case, Jadugoda's people would bear the brunt of the contamination, displacement and dispossession. Upon their return, they started JOAR...to investigate the impacts of radiation on local communities and demand accountability from UCIL. ...To that end, since 1998, JOAR has commissioned epidemiological studies and detailed investigations of uranium's impacts on humans and animals in the local environment".

Birulee and Murmu reached out to Gandhian activists of the Sampoorana Kranti Vidyalaya (SKV, Institute for Total Revolution), based in Vedchhi, a tribal village 60 km from Surat in Gujarat, who conducted a public health study, coordinated and led by a nuclear physicist and a physician, Surendra and Sanghamitra Gadekar. The study focused on four villages near the tailing ponds, and two control villages some fifty km away. From this study JOAR learned that radiation levels in the villages close to the tailing ponds were roughly twenty times higher than those in the villages fifty km away,

and the former set of villages faced significant adverse health outcomes.

Indeed, an April 2004 study, "Radioactive Contamination Around Jadugoda Uranium Mine in India," by Hiroaki Koide, a Japanese scientist at the Research Reactor Institute, Kyoto University, found, among other things, that

"The contamination from the uranium mine has spread in Jadugoda. ...The amount of air-gamma dose exceeds one mSv/y in the villages and reaches ten mSv/y around the tailing ponds. ...The circumference of tailing ponds is polluted with uranium. The strength of the pollution in the tailing ponds is 10 to 100 times higher than the place without contamination. ...Especially [the village] Dungridih that is in contact with the tailing pond has high contamination. However, other villages have not contaminated seriously yet. ...Radon emanated from tailing ponds etc. spreads contamination. ...Mine-tailings used for construction material spreads pollution. ...Product uranium is dealt with carelessly and has fallen in environment. ...[And, Koide emphasises,] I want to add again that the exposure of labours in the mine, including Jadugoda, will be the largest problem. I hope that in the future the sufficient investigation will be done, and the result will be fully announced, and then the necessary relief measures will be taken".

JOAR is still waiting for UCIL to take such measures. Technological upgradation over time in uranium mining and processing, which came after inordinate delay, did not result in a fundamental clean-up, for the mining and processing operations have expanded manifold in the Jadugoda cluster, negating any possible reductions (due to technologi-

cal modernisation) in exposure to gamma rays, inhalation of long-lived radionuclide dust, and exposure to radon and radon decay products, all three, per kg of yellowcake output. One is reminded of the *Jevons Paradox*, well-known to environmentalists, which tells us that technological fixes alone cannot resolve the ecological contradictions of capitalism. Third-generation nuclear power plants, able to reuse spent fuel, will have a lower input coefficient of nuclear fuel, and thus a lower output of yellowcake will be required for the same capacity of nuclear power plants. However, in the wake of such technological breakthrough, the planned expansion of nuclear power capacity will negate this lower output requirement of yellowcake.

So, yellowcake production and two-thousand times that in the form of more tailings will continue to expand. The villagers, mainly Adivasi and oppressed-caste residents, have anyway been kept in abysmal ignorance of the environmental hazards and the accompanying adverse health effects of ura-

DOORSTEP COMPOSITOR

[Contact for Bengali DTP Operator at your Doorstep]

At present, we have started a new facility, throughout India. The Bengali language is now used in many places. Thus, there is a need now to have Bengali Computer Operators for publishing in Magazines, Books, Periodicals, Souvenirs. Further, we have created this new facility for preparing Question Papers for Schools, Colleges and Universities. So, you need not send the confidential works to outside. We can go to your Office or Institution to complete such works. We shall also make them in printable formats. Moreover, the translation to Bengali is also done. You may contact us for these types of work.

However, you have to arrange or pay the expenses for our Travel and Stay. We thus also accept some amount as Honorarium; it depends on the importance and quantum of work. We sincerely expect that you will use the facility.

Please contact: **THE D-COMLASER**
BHASKAR DAS (Proprietor)

39A, Nalin Sarkar Street, Kolkata 700004

Mobile : 98361-58319

Email : bhaskar_sananda@yahoo.com

mium mining and processing. Indeed, they seem to have been deliberately deceived. Over the last five decades, the central government, the regulator–AERB, and the UCIL have disregarded the potential and actual adverse health effects, particularly where the Adivasis and other oppressed-caste villagers have been the potential or actual victims.

However, signs of hope and optimism are evident in biographical snippets of activists like Ghanshyam Birulee, president of JOAR, profiled above, whose father, a uranium miner for UCIL, died of lung cancer in 1984. His mother too—her laundering of his father’s uniforms, caked with uranium dust, likely triggered it. Birulee’s activism in JOAR and JAVBS has likely played a significant role in creating awareness in at least some of UCIL’s direct and indirect (employed through contractors) workforce of the imperative to confront their managements about the life-threatening environmental conditions in the Jaduguda cluster. An environmental proletariat in the making, one hopes. □□□

Notes :

1. <https://www.aerb.gov.in/english/regula->

tory-facilities/nuclear-fuel-cycle-facilities AERB, Policies Governing Regulation of Nuclear and Radiation Safety (Mumbai: Atomic Energy Regulatory Board, July 2014), https://www.aerb.gov.in/images/PDF/Policies_Governing_Regulation.pdf

2. I draw on, not uncritically, Maia Sikina, “Resistance and Resilience in Uranium Mines in Jharkhand”, in *People Against Nuclear Energy: Anti-nuclear Movements in India* edited by Ajmal Khan A. T. (New Delhi: Sage Publications and Yoda Press, 2022), 163–189. This article highlights the human and environmental toll of uranium mining and processing in what became the Jaduguda cluster, from the start in 1968, and Adivasi resistance, albeit belated, to it. It also throws light on Adivasi resilience in the face of the environmental hazards and the adverse health effects that have been accompanying them. I have also referred to relevant press clippings from the late 1990s onward, at <https://www.wise-uranium.org/umopjdg.html>. For instance, a survey conducted by Indian Doctors for Peace and Development (IDPD), affiliated to International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), in association with Jharkhandi Organization Against Radiation (JOAR), in villages 2.5 km from the mines and in villages 30 km away from the mining areas, released in 2008, had come up with the following findings: There was a higher incidence of cancer deaths and early deaths in the

- nearby villages. More children in the nearby villages died each year due to “extreme physical deformity”. There was a higher incidence of “primary sterility”—nearly 10 percent of women in the nearby villages were not able to conceive even three years after marriage (*The Telegraph*, March 2, 2008).
3. Maia Sikina, “Resistance and Resilience in Uranium Mines in Jharkhand”, 181, 183, and 173.
4. Xavier Dias, “DAE’s Gambit”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40, no. 32 (August 6–12, 2005): 3568.
5. Moushumi Basu, “Who Pays the Price for Uranium Mining?” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44, no. 49 (December 5–11, 2009): 15–16.
6. <https://ucil.gov.in/faq.html>
7. Maia Sikina, “Resistance and Resilience in Uranium Mines in Jharkhand,” 172–73.
8. Sv, sievert, represents the stochastic health risk of ionizing radiation, indicative of the probability of causing radiation-induced cancer and genetic damage. Note that the stated mSv/year values are above the limits specified by the International Atomic Energy Agency for public exposure, and especially, far above, for such exposure around the tailing ponds, as also for occupational exposure at the tailing ponds.
9. Hiroaki Koide, “Radioactive Contamination Around Jadugoda Uranium Mine in India” (Kyoto: Research Reactor Institute, Kyoto University, April 27, 2004), <http://www.rri.kyoto-u.ac.jp/NSRG/genpatu/india/JADFINAL.pdf>

WRITING ON THE WALL

Climate Change, Peak Oil, Inequality

Sagar Dhara

THE OP-ED SEASON FOR CLIMATE change articles happens twice a year, once before the inter-governmental Conference of Parties (COP) annual meeting every year-end and the other before its mid-year review meeting. Climate policy negotiators, scholars, scientists and activists write op-eds advising the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change’s (UNFCCC) annual inter-governmental COP meetings and their national governments on what

they need to do to tackle climate change.

For example, in just one national daily, *The Hindu*, in 2021 writers gave the UNFCCC and the Indian Government the following advice: “India must reject any attempt to restrict its options and be into a low-development trap” (*The Hindu*, 8 Apr 2021), “India may even consider to committing to submit plausible pathways and timelines to achieving net-zero emissions as part of its future pledges” (*The*

Hindu, 21 Apr 2021), “India would do well to propose alternate formulations that establish equity” (*The Hindu*, 14 Apr 2021), “Even if India were to enhance its short-term Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement in some fashion, unnecessary as of now, it should do while staking a claim to its share of the global commons” (*The Hindu*, 27 Oct 2021).

Are op-eds heeded by governments? More importantly, can UNFCCC and national governments stop warming in time, and in a just manner? On both counts the op-eds are optimistic. But does history bear them out?

Climate change is one of the three tipping points that human society faces today, each of which can independently regress or even collapse human society. The other two are the rapid depletion of 80 significant non-renewable mineral reserves due to over-extraction, better known as the peak oil phenomenon, and growing inequality due to uneven distribution of wealth.

To produce goods and services,

other sections of society too have fought for their rights—indigenous and minority populations, the disabled, etc., but their battles never grew to the size and intensity of the four leading people's movements.

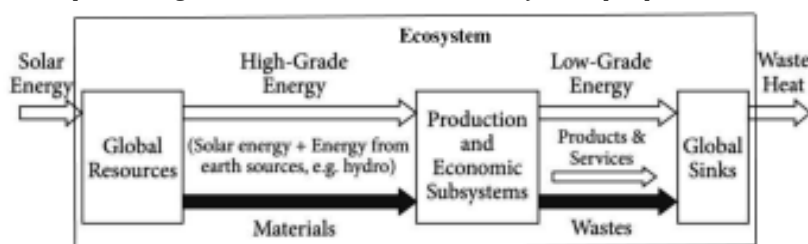
These four leading movements were led by people. Governments opposed these movements and even suppressed them, often violently. Ultimately, the people's movements

series of skirmishes in South India and Jharkhand between small chieftains and the British. This was followed by the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny due to discontent among Indian sepoys over their treatment and triggered by rumours that tallow (cow fat) and lard (pig fat) were used in rifle cartridges, which was anathema for Hindu and Muslim soldiers in the East India Company.

The partition of Bengal in 1905 caused a groundswell of resentment in that state. In response, the Swadeshi movement that called for a boycott of British goods, particularly textiles, became popular throughout India. The radicals in the Indian National Congress (INC), which now led the anti-colonial movement, advocated direct action to overthrow British rule. Pressured by the movement, the British legislated the Government of India Act, 1919 which allowed elected Indian legislators and British officials to share power in British-governed provinces.

Protest against the arrest of two prominent leaders in Amritsar under the draconian Rowlatt Act resulted in the infamous Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919 in which a large gathering of unarmed Indians was fired upon killing at least 379 persons (Indian estimates range up to 1,499). By using non-violent hartals, boycotts, and fasts, Gandhi succeeded in having the Rowlatt Act and 23 other acts repealed in 1922.

In 1920 the INC called for a Satyagraha urging people to boycott British goods, educational institutions and law courts, resign from government employment, refuse to pay taxes, and forsake British titles and honours. In August 1942 the INC called for a non-violent *Quit India* movement and backed it with massive public civil disobedience. The British resorted to mass arrests, public flogging and firing at demonstrators. With all of INC's leaders



humans draw raw materials and energy from the environment (acting as a source), before the production subsystem, and dump wastes back into the environment, (acting as a sink), after the production subsystem.

Inequality—a social tipping point

Inequality results from the unequal distribution of the proceeds from the production and distribution of goods and services made from nature.

Private ownership of natural resources, means of production and capital legitimises the generation, appropriation and concentration of surplus created in production by private entities and the state. This leads to material and economic inequality, which in turn results in social and political inequalities. Inequality generates conflict between those at opposite ends of the inequality spectrum—classes, castes, countries, regions, occupations, genders, races, etc.

The four leading global people's movements against inequality in the last century were anti-colonial revolts, anti-capitalist revolutions, civil rights movements and gender equal-

won concessions, though often they came in stages.

Anti-colonial movements

In the 18th and 19th centuries, West European countries projected their power outside Europe using post-industrial revolution technologies to colonise much of Asia and Africa. They went as traders but subsequently plundered the vast natural resources of these continents and developed new markets for their goods, and finally colonised vast areas on these two continents.

Incipient revolts against colonial governments started in a few Asian countries in the late 19th century. They intensified into a wave of full-fledged people's movements on both continents in the early 20th century. A few colonies gained independence between the two world wars, but empires remained dominant till World War II ended, after which Asian and African countries rid themselves of their erstwhile masters in a short span of 3 decades.

The Indian independence movement is a good example of the twists and turns that the global anti-colonial movements took. It started in the mid-18th century as a

behind bars, the movement became leaderless and resorted to violence in a few places. India had become ungovernable and won independence in 1947 soon after World War II ended.

Civil unrest pressured imperial powers after World War I in their Asian and African colonies. In response, the British promised greater autonomy to its dominions in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and India. The French Government promised citizenship to Senegalese for military services, and reforms in Algeria. Arab nationalism which began as mass uprisings in Iraq, Palestine and Syria was suppressed.

In North Africa, an uprising in Morocco was repressed by France and Spain in the 1920s, and in the 1930s mass protests for independence took root in Algeria and Tunisia. By the end of World War II, unrest took root in sub-Saharan Africa, West and South Africa. These movements often were rainbow coalitions that included businessmen, religious reformers, women's organisations, trade unions, and small farmers.

In some countries, e.g., Rhodesia and Angola, guerilla wars were fought against imperial powers. In others—Indochina, Algeria, Malaya, and Kenya, where armed conflicts were fought, rural populations were drawn into the anti-colonial movements.

Noting the winds of change, Britain granted adult franchise in some countries, e.g., Ceylon, and Jamaica in the 1930s despite a low mass mobilisation till they gained independence after World War II. Portugal transformed its colonies into provinces in the 1950s, and the Netherlands granted internal autonomy to Surinam and Antilles.

Just before World War II began, about 650 million people, i.e., 30% of the then world's population, lived in colonised countries. The sun never

set over the British Empire. Today only 17 "non-self-governing territories" with a population of 2 million, i.e., 0.025% of the global population, exist. Such a massive transformation could have never been achieved without the anti-colonial people's movements of the last century.

Anti-capitalist movements

Capitalism is based on the private ownership of nature and the means of production for generating, appropriating, accumulating and concentrating profit in private hands. Merchant Capitalism appeared first in England in the 16th century and subsequently spread to Europe and the world. In the 18th century, the Industrial Revolution made capitalism the dominant mode of production and divided society into a class of capital owners and working people.

The contradiction between these two classes is inherent in their social relationship. The capitalist class is interested in maximising profits and working people struggle to retain their employment or work and improve their living standards and working conditions. No country has escaped conflict between these classes over issues such as wages or employment. Yet, in the last century, in only a few instances have working people acted to transition from capitalism to a more egalitarian society, either through the ballot box or outside it.

After the French were defeated in the 1870-71 Franco-Prussian War, disgruntled French soldiers and workers seized Paris for 2 months in the summer of 1871 and set up a revolutionary government in what is known as the Paris Commune. Schools that did selective admissions were opened to all, and child labour was abolished. Housing rent was cancelled, pawnshops were closed, night shifts were abolished, factories of owners who had fled

were seized and run by workers, and self-policing was introduced. The state and church were separated. The French army quelled the rebellion after two months.

At the turn of the 19th century, Imperial Russia was an emerging industrial nation vying to catch up with Western Europe. It was also deeply cleaved along class lines. These fault lines surfaced in 1905 and culminated in the overthrow of capitalism in 1917.

The precursor to the 1917 Russian Revolution, a wave of mass political and social unrest—labour strikes, peasant unrest, military mutinies, and the formation of soviets (people's assembly), spread through Russia in 1905 because of public frustration due to economic stagnation, agrarian crisis, political repression, and Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War. The immediate trigger was the events of "Bloody Sunday", in which troops fired on a mass demonstration, killing hundreds. The rebellion converted Russia from an autocracy into a constitutional monarchy and established a Duma (elected legislative), a multi-party political system, and the Russian Constitution of 1906.

The 1917 revolution began in February of that year with widespread public protests in Petrograd due to food shortages and worker strikes for better wages. Within days the protest spread to become a general strike, with some units of the beleaguered army siding with the protesters. The workers formed the Petrograd Soviet and took charge of the food supply and defended Petrograd against possible moves the autocracy may make. The Duma, after hesitating initially, formed a provisional government but was dependent on the Soviets' nod for major decisions. The Tsar was forced to abdicate.

The Bolsheviks used the slogan

“peace, bread and land” to gain popularity among workers, peasants and soldiers, and won a majority in the Soviets. In the next chaotic six months, the Provisional Government gradually lost credibility to the Soviets, and finally, the Soviets took over power in November 1917 after Lenin gave the slogan “All power to the Soviets”.

Political uncertainty reigned in China after the Qing dynasty withered away in the first decade of the 20th century. During that period the Boxer rebellion spearheaded by a shadowy militia against foreigners, further weakened the Qing government. Mutiny by a section of the army based in Wuchang in 1911 paved the way for the abdication of the Qing. By 1916 China had disintegrated into several fiefdoms ruled by warlords. It was another 10 years before China was reunified as a republic by the Guomindang in alliance with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Soon after the Guomindang turned against the CCP. The CCP mobilised the peasantry and won a 20-year civil war in 1949 against the Guomindang government. Notwithstanding a brief and fragile alliance between them to fight against the Japanese invaders during World War II.

Capitalism was overthrown in a few other countries, e.g., Cuba, Vietnam, and Nicaragua. Socialist governments have been elected to power in several countries, e.g., Chile, Venezuela, and Brazil.

While serious attempts were initially made in all these countries to reduce inequality, these efforts were not sustained. Many of these countries have seen inequality rise again. There have been numerous anti-capitalist movements at the local and national levels. While some of them succeeded in reducing inequality, global inequality continues to remain high. Barring Cuba, there

was no attempt to make these societies sustainable.

Civil rights movements

Civil rights movements ask for equality before the law regardless of race, class, caste, gender, colour, religion, or other identities, e.g., the indigenous population. The movement against racial segregation (apartheid), particularly in the USA and Africa, caught the world’s imagination in the last century.

Black slavery was deeply entrenched in the southern US before its independence in 1776. Slavery provided cheap labour to the farmlands in the Southern states. In the 19th century, a global move against slavery influenced the North to abolish slavery. The southern states seceded from the American Union resulting in the American Civil War (1861-65), which the northern states won. This signalled the abolishing of slavery, and an amendment to the US Constitution that freed all bonded persons, granted citizenship to all US-born persons, and gave all men voting rights.

To circumvent the Supreme Court amendments, the Southern states passed the “Jim Crow” laws that discriminated against Blacks--they couldn’t use the same public facilities as the Whites, live in the same neighbourhoods, go to the same schools, marry interracially, and were denied the vote if they failed literacy tests. Though the North did not pass such laws, Blacks there faced discrimination at work and school, and in house purchases.

In 1886 the Supreme Court upheld the Jim Crow laws which required racial segregation. In the early 20th century, the lynching of Blacks rose to its highest levels. In the early 1940s, war-related work boomed, but Blacks did not benefit from it. After thousands of Blacks threatened to march on Washington for equal employment rights, defence

and other government jobs were opened to all Americans in 1941, and in 1948 the armed forces were desegregated.

The civil rights movement peaked in the two decades after World War II ended. The 1954 Supreme Court ruling held that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. In 1955, a 14-year-old black boy, Emmett Till was brutally murdered in Mississippi. His mother took the brave decision to give him a public open-casket burial. The sight of his badly mutilated body sparked revulsion and anger.

In 1955 Rosa Parks, returning from work, complied with segregated bus seating in Montgomery, Alabama. She was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a White. The ensuing outrage reignited the movement against segregation all over the US and triggered a one-year boycott of buses by blacks in Montgomery until the city repealed bus segregation. In 1956, the Supreme Court ruled that segregated bus seating was unconstitutional.

The civil rights movement was impelled forward again in 1957 when 9 black students were jeered and blocked from joining the newly desegregated Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. As a consequence of the movement, the Civil Rights Act passed in 1957, attracted federal prosecution if anyone was prevented from voting. In 1960, when four black college students were refused service at the Woolworths lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, hundreds joined them in sit-ins and boycotted lunch counters until owners of lunch counters caved in.

In 1961, black and white activists, later named the Freedom Riders, boarded an intercity bus in Washington DC to test the 1960 Supreme Court decision that out-

lawed segregation in interstate transportation facilities. White mobs burnt the bus in Anniston, Alabama and beat up the Freedom Riders badly. When they resumed their journey they were incarcerated for trespassing into a “white-only” facility in Jackson, Mississippi despite being met by hundreds of supporters. The Supreme Court reversed the sentence. Hundreds more joined the freedom rides until finally, the Interstate Commerce Commission prohibited segregation in interstate bus terminals in 1961.

The 1963 Birmingham, Alabama the civil rights movement sought to desegregate businesses by doing non-violent sit-ins and demonstrations. Scores of protestors were water hosed and arrested. In the ensuing months, protests spread to more than 100 American cities and public opinion swayed in favour of desegregation and extensions of civil rights to all Americans. Military force was used to desegregate the University of Alabama.

The best-known event of that period was the March on Washington, in which 200,000 persons of all races congregated on 28 August 1963 to demand comprehensive civil rights legislation and equal job opportunities. Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech made headlines and propelled the civil rights movement to centre stage in US politics. Malcolm X argued for Black Nationalism.

The murder of one black and two white activists by the KKK, including police officers, in June 1964 shocked the USA. A month later, the Civil Rights Act, of 1964 was passed to outlaw discrimination based on race, religion, and sexual orientation, and in the workplace and hiring practices, limited the use of voter literacy tests, in schools, and guaranteed equal employment. The Fair Housing Act which became law in 1968

prevented housing discrimination based on race, sex, national origin and religion.

The South African civil rights movement, like that of the US, fought for the equality of races. The racial segregation that existed during the colonial periods before South Africa’s independence in 1931 was formalised by ruling National Party in 1948 creating a lawful divide, called apartheid, between white European settlers (20% of the population), Asians, coloureds and blacks. Apartheid rationalises white superiority and thrusts it on other races, giving whites a gigantic advantage in status and opportunity, including where they could live, work, and go to school. Non-whites had no voting rights, and could not marry whites. Apartheid laws concentrated resources and wealth with whites while severely punishing non-whites for transgressing apartheid laws. Blacks had to carry identity cards, called passbooks, at all times and could not enter White areas without written permission.

In 1952 the African National Congress (ANC), a political party whose ideology was imbedded in equality of races, called for a Defiance Campaign that aimed to break apartheid laws. Blacks were arrested in the thousands for entering white areas, buses, and toilets. A Freedom Charter, adopted in Soweto in 1955 by the ANC and its allies, demanded equal rights for everyone, nationalisation of the country’s national wealth, and land reforms.

A year later 1956 persons were charged with treason but were not convicted for lack of evidence. Women set fire to a beer hall in Durban in 1959 protesting against not being allowed to do home brewing. In 1960, a protest against the carrying of passbooks turned violent in the Black town of Sharpsville. The ensuing police firing left nearly

70 dead and 162 wounded. A state of emergency was declared and the ANC was outlawed. This forced the movement to go underground. In 1962 Nelson Mandela and seven others were convicted for endangering state security and were given life imprisonment.

In 1976 violence broke out in Soweto over government orders giving English and Afrikaans equal status in Black schools. Afrikaans was seen as the language of the whites. The riots left more than 100 dead and 1,000 injured. In 1977 another activist, Steve Biko died in police custody. His funeral, attended by 20,000 people, turned into one of the biggest political rallies of that time.

South Africa now faced international censure and boycott and by the mid-1980s, apartheid started losing its grip. In 1990, Mandela was released and four years later elections were held based on adult franchise for South Africa embarked on its journey to becoming a multi-racial democracy.

Racial discrimination was practised in Europe and many other parts of the world. It has weakened in the 21st century but still persists. The civil rights movements in the USA and South Africa succeeded in getting blacks a degree of justice primarily because of people’s movements and some support from the international opinion that turned against racial discrimination.

Gender equality movements

Women have been the second sex throughout recorded history. Their status—socially, economically and politically—barring in a few societies, was inferior to men. And they were subject to discrimination and violence.

While there were slave revolts in the early civilisations, and serf revolts and movements against the caste system in India in the Middle

Ages, it is surprising that no significant women's movement emerged until well after the Industrial Revolution began in the 18th century.

Women's liberation was a fight against patriarchy and how it operated through the state, religious institutions, society and the family.

The first wave of the women's movement that began in the 19th century asked for women's suffrage, right to property and education. Interestingly, women's suffrage was granted in many European countries after it was granted in the newly independent countries in the mid-20th century.

The second wave started after World War II. Activists fought for better job opportunities, equal pay, changes in divorce and custody laws, reproductive rights, and an end to sexual harassment and violence against women. The movement's priorities in developed and developing countries were somewhat different. For example, in many African countries, the outlawing of genital mutilation was seen as an urgent issue, whereas women in the developed world saw the outlawing of marital rape as being immediately important. In Saudi Arabia, women fought for the right to drive a vehicle, though not as overtly as the battles fought in other countries. Second-wave feminism achieved more equality and rights for women.

The third wave of the movement that emerged in the 1990s worked on issues of the second wave and also addressed issues of expressing individualism and diversity. While earlier the movement drew the more privileged women into its fold, the third wave sought to be more inclusive.

The first decade of the 21st century saw the emergence of the MeToo movement which has focused attention on the patriarchal system that allows for misconduct and relegates women to a second-

ary position. Whether this can be called a fourth wave is moot.

The newer lesbians gays bisexuals, transgenders and queers (LGBTQ) movement is fighting for dignity and equal rights. Recorded history and mythology indicate that Oriental and African societies were more tolerant of gays than Europe. Gay sex depictions abound in the Khajuraho temples. Several Mughal noblemen were known to be gay. Zheng He, a eunuch, became a Chinese admiral in the 15th century and brought his fleet to India's east coast to trade.

Homosexuality was considered a sin by Christian theologians and was punished with castration or even death in Medieval Europe. Till the mid-20th century, gays were hounded and persecuted in Europe. Oscar Wilde, the well-known 19th-century Irish poet and playwright and Alan Turing, mathematician, cryptographer and the father of computer science who played a lead role in cracking German encrypted messages in World War II, were convicted of homosexuality. Both died at a young age; Wilde died of meningitis in prison and Turing was subject to chemical castration and committed suicide. Nazi Germany jailed thousands of gay men for their "deviant" behaviour. Many thousands died in confinement.

The gay liberation movement that started around the 1970s changed Europe and North America's attitude towards "deviant" behaviour. But Europe's exported its medieval outlook towards gays to its colonies, and Asia and Africa are taking longer to make LGBTQs equal citizens. The consequence often is privation and even loss of life. Dr Sreenivas Silas, a Aligarh Muslim University professor was sacked by the university and committed suicide after a secretly filmed video showing him having sex with a rickshaw puller started circulat-

ing, despite a Allahabad High Court order reinstating him in his job.

The late 20th-century gay liberation movement got an impetus from the gay pride marches that started all over the world in the 1970s. Massive marches in Washington in 1987 and 1993 were a million strong. Media attention to gay rights gained space in the 1990s.

With the decriminalisation of sodomy in many countries at the turn of the 21st century, gays and lesbians could finally come out. This was quickly followed by gay marriages being legalised first in the Netherlands, and soon after in Belgium, Spain, and Canada. Yet, homosexuality is illegal in about 75 countries, and in as many as 10 countries-- Iran, Iraq, Mauritania, Nigeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, and Yemen, it is punishable by death.

In 2009, the Delhi High Court passed an order reading down India's sodomy law, Article 377, and held that sexual minorities were equal citizens of India. However, the Supreme Court overturned this ruling in 2013. This rallied gay rights activists to challenge the Supreme Court ruling in and outside courts. In 2018 the Supreme Court ruled that sexual relations between consenting adults is not an offence, in effect decriminalised homosexuality.

Gender equality movements still have a long way to go for women and sexual minorities to become liberated, but the fight has begun.

Growth, its drivers and environmental tipping points

Material growth is the cause of the other two tipping points—peak oil and climate change. As the global economy grows, material and energy throughputs increase, larger quantities of raw materials are extracted and more air, water and solid wastes are emitted.

The growth of energy use, min-

eral extraction, population and GDP was around 0.1% pa between 1 CE and 1800 CE. Since 1800, their growth rates have jumped more than tenfold. The world uses 15.3 Gtoe of energy and 100 Gt of minerals today; and their growth rates over the last 3 decades have been 1.7% per annum (pa) and 2.7% pa, respectively.

Two factors locomote material growth—the impetus to generate increasing amounts of surplus to accumulate and concentrate in private hands, which capitalism does best, and a sense of primary entitlement over nature at the expense of other species, i.e., anthropocentrism.

Humans are the only species that use technology, i.e., knowledge of energy conversion, to create a surplus. Energy, e.g., animate energy, is required to harvest an energy source, e.g., coal, from nature. An investment of one energy unit fetches an energy return that is many times more. The difference between the energy return and investment is surplus.

Surplus is extracted in the process of energy production. The energy invested by humans is to explore, extract, refine and transport the energy source, whereas the energy invested to make the energy source is done by nature, and that is not costed.

If the invested energy is owned by an entity such as an individual, organisation or the state, the energy return is then considered to be a return on the investment to the investor. By re-investing some of the surplus increases the accumulation and concentration of surplus in private hands. This is capitalism, or if the state is the investor and beneficiary, it is state capitalism.

There are two other ways of accumulating and concentrating surplus. The first is by conquest or colonialism, where the surplus cre-

ated by a nation is appropriated by another nation. This is war booty or colonialism. The second is through unequal exchange between sectors of the economy, regions or nations. This is neo-colonialism.

Unequal distribution of surplus powered by private ownership of nature and means of production is the cause of inequality between people, and its derivatives—poverty and deprivation.

The other driver of material growth is anthropocentrism. This worldview centre-stages human beings and side-stages everything else and believes that plants, animals, insects, rocks, water, etc. exist only for human conquest and legitimises their use or destruction for human benefit.

To bolster growth humans have warred against nature. Energy equal to that in 20,000 Hiroshima-sized atom bombs has been used each year for the last 8,000 years to destroy 1/3rd the original 60 million km² of forests that existed then and all that existed in them. The energy expenditure for this grand naturecide exceeds the energy used in all wars fought to date.

Earth has finite quantities of raw material. It took 300 million years to create the known fossil fuel reserves, and in just 300 years people have used about 40% of the original reserve of 1,183 Gtoe of fossil fuels, excluding shales (if shales are included, 30% of original reserves are exhausted). We will run out of oil and gas in about 50 years and coal in less than a century. A techno-economically viable alternative energy source is not yet visible on the horizon. About 80 critical non-renewable minerals, including iron ore and bauxite, will be in short supply in about 50 years. An impending energy and mineral shortage will spell doom for the world and disaster for the developing world

as the global economy will stare at a possible collapse.

The Earth has a finite capacity to absorb waste. The 2,500 GtCO₂ that has been emitted to date has caused a 1.1oC warming over pre-industrial times. If one wishes to remain below 1.5oC warming considered as the upper limit to avoid a climate catastrophe, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions must decrease by about 8% pa for the next 30 years. But global emissions are rising by 1.2% pa today. If we continue along the business-as-usual road, warming by 2100 will be around 3oC above pre-industrial times, sufficient to fry the world.

Environmental movements

Both the roles of the environment as a source of raw materials and a sink for waste are under pressure. To tackle these twin challenges at the national level, the Global North has attempted to secure supply chains for high-risk raw materials such as fossil fuels, rare earths, etc., tightening environmental laws, and outsourcing high polluting production lines. The Global South lagged in protecting itself from a lack of financial and management resources.

UNFCCC's track record in tackling climate change is dismal. The global economy is addicted to growth and increasing surplus and therefore larger amounts of energy. A switch over to renewable energies has not happened. Instead, renewables have added to fossil fuels—a Jevons Paradox. The demand-side management mechanisms of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol—Clean Development Mechanism, Joint Implementation, and carbon markets, have failed miserably.

Biogeochemical cycles, e.g., the carbon cycle, are global cycles. They do not recognise national boundaries. They have been disturbed by human overuse of nature. Fixing

them requires a unified global action that seems to be out of reach in a world divided into nations with differing objectives and priorities.

The Global North, with 16% of today's global population, is responsible for emitting 69% of the cumulative emissions since fossil fuel use began 300 years ago. Yet, the North nations are unwilling to take legal or moral responsibility for their emissions despite the knowledge of its warming impacts being known for over 100 years. To preserve their high living standards, the Global North is keen to keep warming below 1.5°C using technology.

Fast-growing emerging economies of the Global South, e.g., China and India, aspire to join the Global North by burning readily available fossil fuels. They justify their action to be climate justice.

The Climate Vulnerable Forum, a group of 55 highly climate-vulnerable Global South countries, wants both the Global North and the emerging economies of the Global South to reduce emissions as these will bear the brunt of the climate impacts regardless of who emits GHGs.

The probability of remaining

below the 1.5°C warming redline is so small that nobody but charlatans mentions it anymore. Governments and the UNFCCC will not be able to deliver the 1.5°C target.

The only other that could take a crack at tackling climate change are environmental movements. At the local level, they have had mixed success in fighting for cleaner air and water and reduction in solid wastes, and risk from hazardous storages, conserving the environment by advocating against deforestation and promoting non-chemical farming.

But to tackle climate change, environmental movements have a truly daunting task and are handicapped as the movement is barely four decades old and is still at an incipient stage. They are divided into silos tackling a myriad of issues—forests, wildlife, oceans, farming, plastics, pollution, hazardous storage, etc., and their coordination is tenuous.

The four global movements of the 20th century—anti-colonial, civil rights, anti-capitalist and gender equality were led by people and not governments. All four of them fought for equality in law. In addition to this, two of them—anti-colonial and

anti-capitalist movements, asked for fundamental changes in how governments are chosen. Additionally, the anti-capitalist movement asked for a change in the nature of the state—from capitalist to socialist.

To usher in a truly sustainable society, environmental movements must raise the issue of degrowth, climate change, peak oil and inequality, i.e., they have to battle capitalism and anthropocentrism. That is a much bigger agenda than the one that the 20th-century equality movements had.

The 20th-century equality movements took 100 years to mature. If it wishes to meet the 1.5°C warming redline, the environmental movements have to grow up very fast as they do not have the luxury of time that the previous movements had.

Yet, environmental movements are the only hope people have for avoiding an environmental disaster in the decades to come. And if that happens it could well lead to a civilisational collapse. It is time for op-ed writers to recognise the writing on the wall and start working with the environmental movements and advising them. □□□

GLOBAL EMERGENCY

Transition Town Movement

T Vijayendra

THE WORLD IS GOING through a Global Emergency. This has several aspects to it—Resource Depletion, Global Warming, Ecological Degradation, Growing Inequality and Social Unrest.

Human society uses natural resources for its survival and reproduction. Other living beings depend directly or indirectly on plant resources which are renewable. However, human beings also use non-renewable resources including minerals such as coal and petroleum and metals such

as gold, silver, copper and iron. They are considered non-renewable because their quantity is fixed and the more one uses them the less of them are left to use. For industrial societies, petroleum and coal are the basic sources of energy and their depletion can spell the end of industrial society.

Now, there is a law of extraction of these non-renewable resources. It was first discovered in the case of oil by M King Hubbert and is called, 'Peak Oil'. It says that when half the resources are extracted (taken out),

then the production will start falling. That is, the peak of production occurs when half the oil is taken out. It applies to a particular well, to a region, to a country, and to the whole world. Today, it has been found that it applies to all such mineral resources and scientists have calculated the peak year for almost all the important minerals. For one thing the overwhelming majority of them will peak before 2030, starting with oil! So the years of industrial society as it exists are numbered and the end will come in a decade or so. The collapse of industrial society will be a 'never before' event because that will be the end of the historical process of ever-increasing

wealth that human society has seen in the last few thousand years.

While there is a window of a few years before resource depletion triggers a collapse, global warming doesn't really give any window!

The recent IPCC report has drawn everyone's attention to the gravity of the situation. "If we are to stay below 1.5° C global warming, emissions have to peak no later than 2020. Emissions must also be cut by half by 2030, and to net zero by 2040. The people need an immediate emergency response by policymakers, businesses, and civil society, aimed at an unprecedented transformation of all sectors of society. It's time to act!" Well, the world has passed that deadline of 2020.

The levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are the main drivers of climate change. They are measured in 'parts per million (ppm)' and the safe levels are considered to be a maximum of 350, ideally less. They have hit a new record high, the UN said, warning "The window of opportunity for action is almost closed." Today (May 2023) it is 424 ppm! It is probably more correct to say that the window of opportunity for action is closed. No governments are actually prepared to reduce emissions. In fact, this year they have been busy with wars and increasing emissions. This year a group of scientists have claimed that people are moving towards a temperature increase of 3.2 degrees centigrade and have asked the community of scientists globally to go on civil disobedience!

The year, 2022, has already seen some of the worst effects of ecological degradation due to climate change. Europe has seen the worst drought in 500 years. Both the USA and China too are facing drought in large areas. Now these are huge areas and include most of the 'developed countries' as well as consti-

tuting some of the 'food baskets' of the world. Pakistan has faced huge floods involving 30 million people. In India too, large parts of the country have faced floods.

Everyone is familiar with the annual Oxfam report on growing inequality in the world. These inequalities continue to raise protest movements.

There are protest movements all over the world mobilising against the livelihood crisis and the steep rise in the price of essentials brought on initially by the Covid-19 pandemic and the crippling lockdowns that followed, and exacerbated by the war in Ukraine. Global warming, coupled with resource depletion, ecological disaster, growing people's movement, and wars among capitalist nations can together trigger a collapse of the system.

Today Sri Lanka and 27 other small countries are going through a process of collapse. In 2023, huge strikes took place in the U K, France and Netherlands against inflation and demand for higher wages. The recent collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and other banks shows the world is in the middle of the collapse. Capitalism can neither solve these problems nor can it outlive it. So people have to look for alternatives immediately.

Meaning and History of Transition

It is still not known what the alternative would be. It depends on the history of a specific country. It can be any of the alternatives tried out before or a modified form of it. For example it can be socialism, eco-socialism, anarchism, and some modified form of parliamentary democracy and so on. The Transition Town Movement is one such response. It belongs to the tradition of anarchism in general and to permaculture in particular.

Briefly: 1. Anarchists are op-

posed to all authority, 2. Anarchists believe in self-management within a local community on the basis of 'a free association of free people', and 3. The Anarchist community will federate with other communities also on the basis of 'a free association of free people'.

The term 'Permaculture' was coined by Dr Bill Mollison of Tasmania, Australia in the early 1970s to mean Permanent Agriculture or Permanent Culture. David Holmgren was a collaborator in this venture. It was initially conceived as a framework for a more permanent basis for agriculture rather than just the raising of annual crops. However, Permaculture has now come to mean much more than food sufficiency at household level. Today Permaculture has come to mean a whole life system. The aim is to evolve self-financing and self managed systems to provide for all the material and non-material needs, without depleting, polluting and destroying the natural resources of the biosphere.

The terms transition town, transition initiative and transition model refer to grassroots community projects. The aim is to increase self-sufficiency to reduce the potential effects of peak oil, climate destruction, and economic instability. This is done through re-localisation strategies, especially around food production and energy usage, taking the world from the present capitalist/industrial stage of society to an alternative stage.

History of Transition Town

Kinsale is a small town on the South East Coast of Ireland. In 2004, Rob Hopkins taught permaculture design at the Kinsale Further Education College. Two young women, Louise Rooney and Catherine Dunne were his students. He set them the task of applying permaculture principles to 'Peak Oil'. The objective was to reduce the

dependency of Kinsale town on fossil fuels to zero in ten years. They produced the now famous Kinsale Energy Descent Plan. They applied the principle in the realm of energy production, health, education, economy and food production. The plan was presented to Kinsale Town council. To their surprise, the councilors decided to adopt the plan and work towards energy independence. The first Transition Town was born! Hopkins moved to his hometown, Totnes in England where he and Naresh Giangrande developed these concepts into the transition model. In early 2006, Transition Town Totnes was founded and became the inspiration for founding of other Transition initiatives. By September 2013, there were 1130 initiatives registered in 43 countries.

Transition India

There are no transition town models in India. Nor is there any group or organisation called transition town. Yes, there are several individuals and small groups who are aware of the concept and are implementing in their own way in a few specific activities. Kerala seems to have a larger number of such people. The term 'Transition Kerala' and a group called 'Transition Studies' in Thrissur headed by K Sahadevan are well-known. This writer's booklet on it is translated into Kannada, Marathi and Bengali. So there are a few people and groups in these states too.

However, without the name and an articulated concept, the need is felt by people, organisations and even by the government. They have undertaken several activities which would fall under transition and some of them are indeed very good. So there is a lot of hope for people in India.

The main problem with some of these activities is that only a few of them have been inspired by ideas of local self sufficiency, de-scaling of

energy use and simplicity. These are mainly NGOs and individuals who carry the legacy of the independence movement – ideas of Swaraj and Gram Swaraj etc. Other activities are inspired by the modern green movement and often are in the mould of 'green capitalism'. Only time will tell how they will move, change and succeed or fail!

The Vision of Future

No alternative energy source can replace the petrol and gas which run trucks and cars. Today, transportation is so basic to global capitalism that its breakdown alone can cause the system to collapse. No alternative energy can generate the amount of energy people are using now. The implication of the above is that 'globalisation' is no longer possible. The present level of consumption will result in unacceptable levels of global warming and ecological degradation.

Based on the above, one can deduce that post-industrial societies will have the following main features:

1. Equality
2. A scaling down of the use of resources-particularly energy
3. Local self-sufficient economy
4. Ecological restoration of the present degraded ecology
5. A value system or ethical base which is more cooperative and less competitive than the present society.

What is to be done?

As a general rule the key word is voluntary simplicity at a personal level. It is of course true that one person reducing her/his energy consumption/eco footprint cannot significantly change the situation. As the critics often say, 'if you don't use it someone else will use it'. But it does give one the moral energy to go ahead and involve in larger issues in larger contexts.

Local Response in Urban Areas: Transition Town

About 70% of emissions which cause global warming come from

cities. Rural people follow cities as role models to copy. So cities should take a leading role in meeting the challenge of global emergency.

The aim of transition town would be to prepare a plan to make the town fossil fuel free in ten years. One can start with a town or part of a town which is human scale. It would be about 10,000 people and an area of 25 square kilometres. It is something similar to what people are calling a 15 minute town.

Air

The biggest polluters of air in urban areas are fossil fuel driven vehicles-scooters, cars, buses and trucks. Of these cars have the highest per capita emissions. While it is not visible yet, petrol and diesel are on their way out. Electric vehicles (EVs) are showing up. Fortunately in India it is mainly two wheeler EVs. Bicycle movement is catching on in almost all cities. Cycle rickshaws have never vanished and four wheel push carts also are there.

Water

All human settlements are based near water sources-lakes, rivers and wells. In fact the size of a human settlement until recently was based on the availability of water in the vicinity. Only availability of cheap energy allowed cities to pump water from distant rivers. Today in most cities every drop of water consumed involves some coal (due to electricity in pumping) and/or petrol for tanker transport. As energy supply and size of the town reduce, local water supplies will again become important. Rain water harvesting in new buildings is becoming a law in most cities. It will get better implemented as water scarcity increases. Repair and restoration of tanks and other water bodies is being urgently taken up in many towns and large movements to save the lakes in Bangalore and Hyderabad also have come up. Efforts should ensure that

all lakes get clean/rain water to make lakes potable, fishable, swimmable. And finally to ensure that the water table in the area rises year by year to reach 20 feet.

Waste Management

Plastic is currently the biggest source of solid waste and single use plastic has been banned in the country. Then segregation at source between green and red waste, recycling of non-biodegradable waste and composting the biodegradable waste is the next step. Further one needs to ensure zero-waste management and also ensure that industrial and sewage waste does not go to the river or water bodies. The toughest problem to crack is converting latrines to compost latrines instead of flushing the excreta to pollute lakes and rivers. In small towns Sulabh Shouchalaya has done remarkable work since 1969.

Food

To reduce food miles, all food should be locally procured, except salt which may have to be imported from outside. Perishables like fruits and vegetables should be produced within the local area. Organic home and terrace vegetable gardening is becoming popular in many cities. Again Kerala seems to be very well organised.

Health and Education

India has a very poor performance in these fields. Urban health has deteriorated to an unprecedented level. People are breathing poison, drinking poison and eating poison. The last is mainly due to the junk food sold in packets and served in restaurants. They all are character-

ised by HFSS—high fat, salt and sugar. In education some states have a better record. But privatisation of education is ruining people and children. Some NGOs have done exemplary work in these areas and the Delhi government also appears to have done some very good work.

Employment Generation and Entrepreneurship

New green entrepreneurship and employment opportunities are coming up; such as rain water harvesting, waste processing and composting, home gardening resources, bicycle stands and bicycle repair and maintenance shops, markets for organic and green local products, sale, maintenance and repairs of solar cookers, water heaters and solar panels, etc. The main aim is that at the end of 10 years everyone will be earning their livelihood through green jobs.

Concurrently the society must organise 'awareness building activities' in terms of talks, film shows, local surveys which have provocative questions that can make people aware. The aim is to bring out a local youth leadership to lead the movement in the community.

Ecological Village

It can be summarised as: Some 80% rural households—peasants and non-peasants are in debt. Their agricultural work does not pay them enough to pay back their debts. Why are they in debt? The main reason is the introduction of the green revolution and milk schemes. There are many names to it: Commercialisation of agriculture, Development or Capitalist penetration in agriculture etc. Whatever the name, it has three well known results:

1. Increase in production and wealth,
2. Increase in disparity. The rich get much richer whereas the poor may earn more money than before, but they also get in greater debt
3. Increase in Ecological degradation.

Since the green revolution and white (milk) revolution requires a lot of cash inputs, they have to sell their products. So a lot of agriculture at present comprises non-food crops. Cotton, sugar cane, tobacco and jute are traditional cash crops. New cash crops have been added like soya (oil cakes for cattle, mainly exported to Iran), and maize (mainly for poultry industry), flowers (mainly for export to cities) and special grass for feeding the milch cattle for supplying milk to the chilling plants of the milk federations. Area under crops, area under irrigation and total production has increased in a big way at the cost of forests and grasslands.

All this has generated enormous wealth and money in rural areas. This has led to consumerism which has increased expenses of rural people enormously. Rural people are trying to follow the role model of urban people—English medium education, motor cycles, smart phones, non-local intoxicants. It has also created new problems, such as health—both physical and mental. Green revolution poisons air, water and food. Consuming them both at the farming level (spraying of pesticides) and breathing, drinking and eating them creates health problems. Increased mechanisation of agriculture and mechanisation of transport have made people unhealthy and their medical expenses have gone up enormously. Suicides are increasing due to debts and mental health issues.

Green revolution is also worsening the health of the soil and leading to a general ecological degradation of the rural areas. As the area under agriculture increases, the area under forest and commons and grassland decreases. Excessive water consumption by crops has led to depletion of lakes and ground water to dangerous levels. Poor landless labourers suffer more because they

For **Frontier** Contact

MYTHRY BOOK HOUSE

MASJID LANE, KARL MARX ROAD
VIJAYWADA-520 002

depend on commons and forests partially.

Family ties are broken and individualisation has increased.

What is Happening

These problems are well known and many people are addressing them. PARI (People's Archives of Rural India) is a leading organisation addressing these problems. Many individuals are reporting positive initiatives taken by rural people and organisations. Countercurrents (Bharat Dogra), Vikalp Sangam (Baba Mayaram) and Better India regularly carry these articles.

The main activities going on are organic and natural farming which includes waste management in the form of composting and water management. There are several good NGOs who have taken initiatives in health and education. Some of them carry more than one topic: 1. education and environment issues, 2 health, education and organic farming, 3. education and elimination of child labour. Some like DDS in Telangana have done pioneering work in food security by introducing pds based on local procurement. In Karnataka NREGA unions have won Panchayat elections and can intervene in rural development programmes.

Often the government through local administration has helped in these activities. More recently the government at a policy level has taken a big initiative in terms of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

People's Movement and Pandemic

From the early seventies, in the wake of revolutionary movements that started in the late 60s the consciousness about the evils of development began to grow. One of the earliest was the Silent Valley Movement in the Palakkad district of Kerala. It was started in 1973 to save the Silent Valley Reserve Forest from being flooded by a hydroelec-

tric project. Since then there have been movements in practically every state in India. For example, Koel Karo movement in Jharkhand, Narmada Bachao Andolan spread over three states, Niamgiri movement in Odisha, and Save Western Ghats which also was spread over several states and so on. While in most cases the movements 'failed' to achieve their goals, they transformed millions of people in their attitude towards 'development'.

During the three month of the lockdown during the pandemic, people learned an important lesson. In a real crisis, the government just gives up and that the people can take care of themselves. While there were indeed a lot of sufferings, the people from all walks of life showed remarkable resilience. And Nature recovered at a speed that surprised even the experts. So if and when capitalism collapses, and it seems that the world is in the middle of it, there are actually a lot of positive things to look forward to! □□□

Acknowledgement

This is an abridged version of the text of the talk that was delivered under the auspices of the Vivekananda Chair, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala, on May 27, 2023.

Notes

1. This article is essentially an updated version of my booklet, Kabira Khada Bazar Mein: Call for Local Action in the Wake of Global Emergency (2019, <https://archive.org/details/kabira-khada-bazaar-mein>)
2. Part I, 'Global Emergency and End of Modern Technology and Alternatives', of this article is mainly taken from my article, 'Questioning Technological Determinism - II' 11/09/2022, <https://countercurrents.org/2022/09/questioning-technological-determinism-ii/?swcfpc=1>.
3. For defining permaculture material from 'New Agriculture: A Permaculture Point of View' by Venkat, has been used (2012, Hyderabad, Permanent Green/ Manchi Pustakam).
4. For material on Transition Town the source is mainly Wikipedia.

FRONTIER

44, Baram Dey Street, Kolkata-700006

Phone: (033) 2530-0065

Mail: frontierweekly@yahoo.co.in

frontierweekly@hotmail.com

Site: www.frontierweekly.com

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

India [Annual] Rs. 500

Frontier Associate [Annual] Rs. 1000

Life Subscription [Inland] Rs. 5000+

Make payment by Cheque/Draft
in favour of

GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.
or

FRONTIER [GERMINAL
PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.]

MO should be addressed to Frontier
Please add Rs. 50/- to inland outstation
cheques towards bank charges, all
remittances to FRONTIER

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

**Payment could be made directly to
our bank accounts as given below.**

**Check the bank details before
transferring money. Also inform us
through e-mail after sending money.**

Beneficiary Name:

GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.

Bank Name: CENTRAL BANK OF INDIA

Address: 8, Lenin Sarani, Kol-700013

Branch: Esplanade Branch

Current Account Number: 3116713216

IFSC Code: CBIN0280098

Swift Code: CBININBBBCAL

OR

GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.

Bank Name: PUNJAB NATIONAL BANK

Address : 223, C. R. Avenue, Kolkata-6

Branch: Jorasanko Branch

Current Account Number: 0085050001319

IFSC Code: PUNB0008020

Branch Code : 0008020

Swift Code: UTBIINBBBOBC

OR

**FRONTIER (GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS
PVT. LTD)**

Bank Name: PUNJAB NATIONAL BANK

Address : 223, C. R. Avenue, Kolkata-6

Branch: Jorasanko Branch

Current Account Number: 0085050001378

IFSC Code: PUNB0008020

Branch Code : 0008020

Swift Code: UTBIINBBBOBC

*For MO, Regd. Post and Speed Post
mailing address should be written in the
following fashion :

To

FRONTIER

C/o Durbar Mahila Samanawya Committee

44, Baram Dey Street, Kolkata-700006

West Bengal, Contact : 8240016324

LIVING HELLS

Condition of Prisons and Prisoners

Aurobindo Ghose

AS OF 31 DECEMBER 2020, there are 1,306 functioning jails in India, having 4,88,511 prisoners with actual capacity to house only 4,14,033 prisoners. The 1,306 prisons in the country consist of 145 Central Jails, 413 District Jails, 565 Sub Jails, 88 Open Jails, 44 Special Jails, 29 Women Jails, 19 Borstal Schools and 3 Other Jails. Delhi has the highest number of Central Jails while Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of District Jails. Rajasthan has the highest total number of Jails.

Even the President of India, Smt Draupadi Murmu drew attention on Constitution Day (25 November 2022) to the chronic problem of overcrowding in Indian jails and suggested, “decongesting jails by releasing poor under-trials languishing there for years for petty crimes even while some people who killed others, are roaming free. What is the need to set up more jails? Are we moving towards development? We need to reduce their numbers,” she said.

The condition of prisoners in Indian prisons is starkly reflected in four situations. First, the treatment of the political prisoners with respect to their essential requirements. Second, the position of the children and women members of suspected migrant families in Assam. Third, the arbitrary and round-about manner of detaining and arresting protesters of the CAA and NRC in UP. And fourth, the application of the three draconian, allegedly (so-called) anti-terror laws relating to sedition, National Security Act (NSA) and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA).

President Draupadi Murmu’s call to the government and the judiciary

to address the issue of overcrowding of prisons is significant and a very welcome intervention. “I hear these days that we will have to make new prisons because prisons are overcrowded. If we are moving towards progress as a society, then why do we need new jails? We should be closing down existing ones.”

According to the Prison Statistics India 2021, a report published by the National Bureau of Record of Crime (NBRC), Ministry of Home Affairs between 2016 and 2021 the number of convicts in jails have decreased by 9.5 percent whereas the number of under-trial inmates has increased by 45.8 percent. With three out of four prisoners being under-trials, the problem of overcrowding of prisons is essentially an under-trial issue. As of December 31, 2021, around 80 percent of prisoners were confined for periods up to a year. The report states that an overwhelming 95 percent of under-trials released in 2021 were granted bail by courts while a mere 1.6 percent were released on acquittal by court. It shows that the sluggish pace at which trial courts work to reach a final decision cannot keep up with the increasing number of under-trials.

The Supreme Court recently asked the government to think “out of the box” and consider a one-time measure to release prisoners in certain cases on the occasion of the 75th year of Independence. While it is imperative for the top court to ensure that its liberal stance on bail percolates to the trial courts, it is also disingenuous to characterise the under-trial crisis as a mere bail issue.

The abysmally abject, inhuman,

cruel and wholly arbitrary treatment of the political prisoners with respect to their dire necessities or essential requirements, is best illustrated by the cases of four of the sixteen Bhima-Koregaon political prisoners - late Father Stan Swamy, poet Varavara Rao, activist Gautam Navlakha, advocate Surendra Gadling - and former Delhi University professor, disabled, wheelchair-borne GN Saibaba serving a life-sentence for alleged Maoist links.

The term ‘political prisoner’ is used by persons or groups challenging the legitimacy of the detention of a prisoner. In general usage, any person who is in jail without reason, in abrogation of his or her fundamental rights or basic human rights or freedom of expression, is a political prisoner.

Foreigner Tribunals (FT), under the Foreigners’ Act, 1946, set up in Assam since 1964 have been tackling the issue of influx of illegal immigrants. A Bengali Hindu family of four was found to be languishing in the Kokrajhar detention centre for the last seven years only because the family had ignored notices from the FT, even while the elders of the family were all enjoying the freedom of Indian citizenship. Giving this family company in the detention centre, were five individual women, both Hindus and Muslims, who were the only ones in their family charged with being illegal immigrants, even though their husbands, parents and siblings continued to be Indian citizens. According to a Supreme Court ruling, illegal immigrants can be held in the detention centres only up to three years, after which they are eligible for bail. However, both ignorance of the law as well as their abject poverty, deter them financially to afford the bail. What is indeed distressing is that about 19 lakh people from Assam have not been included in the latest

*With Best
Compliments
From*

D Prakash Reddy

National Register of Citizens (NRC), and they have all to assiduously prove their citizenship, failing which they may be moved to the detention centres, as political prisoners. The sword of Damocles hangs over their heads! For the vast number of poor, backward and ignorant citizens involved in this large exercise, it will be well-nigh impossible to obtain such age-old documents or to have access to lawyers or legal advice to prove that the available documents confer citizenship.

The UP Police imposed major fines on those protesting against the Citizen's Amendment Act (CAA) for allegedly damaging public property, and when they failed to pay the fines, they were arrested. Although ostensibly they were arrested for criticising the CAA, that it discriminated between citizens on the basis of their respective religions, it was done in a round-about way.

Section 124-A dealing with the law of Sedition was inexplicably omitted when the Indian Penal Code (IPC) drafted by Lord Macaulay, was enacted in 1860. Section 124-A was inserted in 1870. It was one of the many draconian colonial laws enacted to stifle the voice of dissent. Some of the most famous sedition trials of the late 19th and early 20th Century involved Indian nationalists' leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi and that of newspaper editors like Jogendra Chandra Bose of the newspaper *Bangabasi*. The new CPC and other versions of Criminal Law have done without the old Sedition Law but it has been incorporated in its new avatar as Section 150 of the new Bill known as the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanitary (Bill) 2023.

The latest breaking news is that encounter killings have come back into Yogi Adityanath's Uttar Pradesh.

The Jammu & Kashmir High

Court recently quashed a sedition case against a Ladakh Councillor for comments on the Indian Army after Galwan clash, saying it is a "sheer abuse of law." The Court said that though the comments may have been "unsavoury and detestable", it would not amount to "sedition".

Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act is an Indian law allegedly aimed at prevention of unlawful activities of individuals and associations in India. Its main objective was to make powers available for dealing with activities directed against the integrity and sovereignty of India. It is a black law, and those arrested under its provisions are deemed to be 'political prisoners'.

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data shows a rising graph of UAPA cases in J& K: from less than 60 cases annually until 2015, to 255 cases in 2019, the year of the revocation of Art. 370 in Kashmir and also the latest year for which NCRB data is available. Lawyers say that the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) is a stringent anti-terror law which prescribes seven years' imprisonment against any unlawful activity "intended to disrupt the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India" or "is intended to cause disaffection against India".

Housing nearly twice its original capacity, in 9 separate jails, Tihar is one of the most populated prisons in the whole of South Asia. As per the data provided by Jail authorities, Tihar has approximately 11,738 inmates as opposed to its capacity of housing 6,250 persons. 82 percent of Tihar's inmates consist of under-trials, while convicts and detenues make up for the remaining 18 percent. In terms of total share, women prisoners constitute roughly 4 percent while men make up the remaining 96 percent. Jail No 6 in Tihar houses women prisoners where

the number of women under-trial prisoners constitute roughly 85 percent of the total.

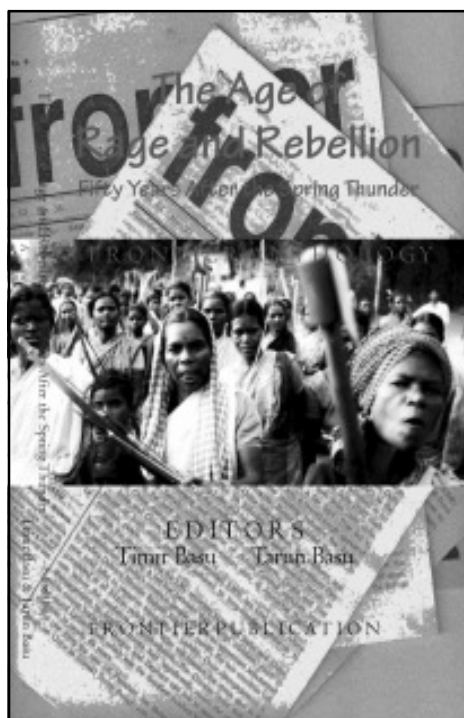
Report on workshop on Prisoners under Arrest or Awaiting Trial organised by the Commonwealth Human Rights Institute discussed the various rules and rights that prisoners under arrest or awaiting trial are entitled to and the guidelines for non-official visitors will be referred to as 'untried prisoners'. Unconvicted prisoners are presumed to be innocent and shall be treated as such. Untried prisoners shall be kept separate from convicted prisoners and shall sleep singly in separate rooms. Young untried prisoners shall be kept separate from adults and in principle be detained in separate units.

The status of congestion in the jails at present is amply brought out by the following data in 2018 (Prison Statistics in India, 2018, National Crime Records Bureau). The all-India average rate of occupancy is 117.6%. More seriously, the figures are 176.5% in Uttar Pradesh, 157.3% in Sikkim, 154.3% in Delhi, 153.3% in Chhattisgarh, 149% in Maharashtra and 143.5% in Meghalaya. At such a level of overcrowding, basic requirements to maintain hygiene cannot be provided, and social distancing mandated to deal with the pandemic cannot be implemented. In such a situation the infection could spread at an unimaginable pace.

So far as women held in protective custody are concerned, according to the women's rights advocates and human rights lawyers, the majority are rape victims. Because of the stigma that an Indian woman suffers if she has been raped, the authorities apparently fear that the victim will not show up in court to testify against her rapist. Accordingly, she is imprisoned to make certain that she is available to testify at trial.

A **frontier** Publication

Just Released



THE AGE OF RAGE AND REBELLION: 50 YEARS AFTER THE SPRING THUNDER

[Price: INR 300+ 100 for postage]

(An anthology of articles and interviews published in frontier to commemorate and re-assess the Naxalbari uprising)

Editors:

Timir Basu and Tarun Basu

Contributors: Santosh Rana, Debabrata Panda, Arup Baisya, Farooque Chowdhury, Jan Myrdal, Harsh Thakor, Bernard D'Mello, Timir Basu, Gautam Navlakha, Lawrence Lifschultz, Ranabir Samaddar, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Nazes Afroz, Subhendu Dasgupta, Sumanta Banerjee, Varavara Rao, Ramachandra Guha, Dipanjan Raychowdhuri, Alope Mukherjee, T Vijayendra, Mallikarjuna Sharma and Nirmal Brahmachari

Available at: FRONTIER Office and PATIRAM STALL (College Street) MANISHA, DHAYNBINDU (College Square) and other book stalls selling regular issues of frontier.

The report of the Expert Committee, which was published in February 1988, also discussed the torture and rape that women endured in the custody of the police en route to prison. As for the female non-criminal lunatics, the conditions that they endure in prison were described as the worst of all.

The notion of prison discipline was to make imprisonment a deterrent. Consequently, hard punitive labour with no regard for the human personalities and severe punishments were the main basis of prison treatment. More than 40 prison offences have been listed in the jail manuals of many States and any infraction was visited by harsh punishments. Gradually, the objective of imprisonment changed from mere deterrence to deterrence and reformation. This led to the abandonment of some of the severe forms of punishments and introduction of a system of awards for good work and conduct in the form of remission, review of sentences, wages for prison labour, treatment in open conditions, parole, furlough, canteen facilities etc.

Today, prison is treated more as a correctional or improvement facility which itself indicates that there

is more emphasis on reformation of prisoners in the process of punishment. To achieve this goal, a congenial atmosphere is required to be created in jails for the benefit of inmates. Apart from emphasis on social and ethical values for integration with society after release, inmates also require educational, recreational and vocational training facilities.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) remains the core international treaty on the protection of the rights of prisoners. India ratified the Covenant in 1979 and is bound to incorporate these provisions into its domestic laws and state practices. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESR) states that prisoners have a right to the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health. Apart from civil and political rights, the so-called second generation economic, social and human rights as set down in the ICESR also apply to the prisoners.

Prison is a State subject under List-II of the Seventh Schedule in the Constitution. The management and administration of Prisons falls exclusively in the domain of the State Governments, and is governed by the Prisons Act, 1894 and the Prison Manuals of the respective State Governments. Thus, States have the primary role, responsibility and power to change the current prison laws, rules and regulations governed by a number of statutes and codes.

Despite the relatively low number of persons in prisons as compared to many other countries in the world, there are some very serious problems in prisons across India. These are: overcrowding, prolonged detention of under-trials, unsatisfactory living conditions, staff shortage and poor training, corrup-

tion and extortion, inadequate social reintegration programmes, poor spending on healthcare and welfare, lack of legal aid.

The Model Prison Manual 1960 is the guiding principle for prison management in India. On the lines of the Model Prison Manual 1960, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, in 1972, appointed a working group on prisons. It brought out in its report the need for a national policy on prisons. It also made an important recommendation with regard to the classification and treatment of offenders and laid down certain principles.

The Model Prison Manual 2016 was finalised with the approval of the Home Ministry and circulated to all States and Union Territories for their guidance. The new manual aims at bringing uniformity in laws, rules and regulations governing prison administration and management of prisoners all over the country. Its key features include an emphasis on prison computerisation, special provisions for women prisoners, focus on after care services, prison inspections, rights of prisoners sentenced to death, repatriation of foreign prisoners, enhanced focus on prison correctional staff, to name a few.

Many developed countries, like Finland which is a pioneer in the open jail concept, have introduced open prisons. There are no bars or no uniforms. Instead of old style cells, there are rooms with bed, neat toilets, kitchen, televisions, etc. Prisoners go for long walks, tend the garden, and more importantly they are paid reasonably for their work. The advantage is that it makes detainees better prepared to return to society. The management cost of such prisons is 33 percent lower than the traditional prisons. Hoshangabad, in Madhya Pradesh has an open prison built on 17 acres of land, where convicts during



the last two years of their sentence are transferred from other prisons in the State to make them familiar with reformed environs. Prisoners go out for work daily like normal people do from their homes and return at the end of the day.

Though various bodies have stud-

ied the problems of prisons in India and laws are made for improving jail conditions, it is a fact that many problems plague Indian prisons. In many cases, prisoners come out of jails as hardened criminals more than as reformed wrong doers willing to join the mainstream social processes.

The emphasis on correctional aspect needs to be strengthened through counselling programmes by experts. The mindset of the prison staff must change. The management of prisons must be marked by discipline and due regard to the human rights of prisoners. □□□

HARD TIME FOR RUSSIAN INTELLECTUALS

Boris Kagarlitsky in New ‘Gulag’

K M Seethi

IN THE COMPLEX REALM OF contemporary Russia, social life has become a challenging cauldron of ideas, dissent, and resistance. Under the regime of President Vladimir Putin, the nation’s intellectual circles have traversed a disturbing path, marked by a delicate balance between self-expression and state control.

It has been several weeks since Boris Kagarlitsky, a prominent figure in the Russian Leftist intellectual sphere, a distinguished social scientist and prolific political writer, was arrested. On July 25, an unexpected turn of events unfolded for Kagarlitsky as he was hurriedly arrested and transported over 1000 kilometres away from Moscow to Syktyvkar in the Komi Republic.

On the same day, a local court ruled to detain him for a duration of two months, all emerging from allegations related to his purported support for ‘acts of terrorism’. The potential consequences of this situation loom large, as a guilty verdict from the court could subject Kagarlitsky to the grim possibility of a prison sentence extending up to seven years.

For Kagarlitsky this was not the first episode of incarceration. Way back in 1982, he confronted a hard time when he was jailed due to his association with a group of ‘Young Socialists’ who openly criticised the

Soviet bureaucratic leadership. Notwithstanding this setback, Kagarlitsky remained deeply involved in the political sphere, particularly during Gorbachev’s Perestroika era. Throughout these years, he undertook a parallel journey, producing intellectually stimulating works that delved into intricate social and political matters. Over the subsequent three and a half decades, his literary output thrived, resulting in a multitude of influential books and essays that have made significant contributions to the discourse on these critical subjects.

Kagarlitsky served as a professor at the Moscow School for Social and Economic Sciences and the editor of the influential left-wing media outlet Rabkor. Kagarlitsky’s academic journey began with a focus on theatre criticism, but his involvement in dissident activities led to his expulsion in 1980. He served as the editor of the ‘samizdat’ journal *Levy Povorot* and was arrested on ‘anti-Soviet’ charges, eventually released in 1983.

During Mikhail Gorbachev’s perestroika, Kagarlitsky resumed his studies and became involved in political activism. He played a key role in various political organisations, including the Moscow People’s Front, Moscow City Soviet, and the Socialist Party (USSR), and co-founded the Party of Labour (Russia) in 1992.

In 1993, Kagarlitsky was again arrested for opposing President Boris Yeltsin during the constitutional crisis but was released due to international protests. His job and the Moscow City Soviet were dissolved later that year under Yeltsin’s new constitution.

From 1994 to 2002, he worked as a senior research fellow at the Institute for Comparative Political Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences and earned his Doctorate degree in 1995 for his thesis on “Collective Actions and Labour Policies in Russia in the 90s”. He has also been associating with the Institute of Globalisation Studies and Social Movements, Transnational Institute, etc.

Earlier, Kagarlitsky’s book *Thinking Reed* earned him the prestigious Isaac Deutscher Prize. He expanded his influence internationally with works like *Dialectics of Change* and *A Farewell to Perestroika*, initially in English and later translated into Japanese and Turkish. *Square Wheels*, among many other works, also received a wide readership. He later took charge as a professor at the Moscow School for the Social and Economic Sciences, enriching academia with his insights.

Of late, Kagarlitsky’s unwavering commitment to activism has taken a toll on his personal life, exemplified by his ill-timed arrests and repeated legal penalties. His unyielding dedication to democratic principles has driven him to take bold actions. In 2020, he organised a rally to oppose constitutional changes

that could potentially enable President Putin to seek a fifth term in office. Similarly, in 2021, he used social media to mobilise support for protests against alleged voter fraud. These principled actions drew the attention of authorities, resulting in legal repercussions for Kagarlitsky.

In 2022, Kagarlitsky faced yet another daunting hurdle as he was officially labelled a 'foreign agent'. This designation, carrying significant legal implications, complicated his ability to freely express his views. It was a consequence of his steadfast internationalist stance on Russia's war on Ukraine, a position that had drawn the ire of the authorities. Remarkably, despite the increasing adversities, Kagarlitsky demonstrated steadfast resilience. He chose not to leave the country, and even more notably, he refused to retreat from the public arena. His determination to persist in his work and advocacy in the face of such challenges serve as powerful evidence of his resolute commitment.

Kagarlitsky's writings have played a pivotal role in shaping the intellectual development of successive generations of young Russian communists and adherents of Leftist ideologies. His scholarly contributions stand as a potent counterbalance to the enduring influence of late-Soviet, Stalinist 'official Marxism'. Yet, Kagarlitsky's dedication to his cause transcends the realm of writing. He consistently extended intellectual support to fellow left-wing activists, offering his expertise whenever the occasion demanded. His commitment exceeded the boundaries of academic pursuits, as he rarely declined opportunities to engage in intellectual discourse with matching essences at various left-wing conferences and gatherings.

On March 21, 2023, Kagarlitsky wrote on the Ukraine war:

"For many years, I've criticised Western policies towards Ukraine

and media myths about it. But today, both Ukraine and Russia face new and complex challenges. Russia's regime has shifted from moderate authoritarianism to a more totalitarian system. It's crucial not to conflate Ukrainian politics with the ongoing war...Ukraine has its issues, including controversial language legislation and problematic policies towards Donbas. Human rights violations have occurred on both sides since the 2014 conflict. However, these issues can't justify Russia's massive invasion of Ukrainian territory. Efforts to rationalise the Kremlin's decision as defending Russia's interests lack credibility and don't hold up to scrutiny."

According to Kagarlitsky,

"Ukraine is now a victim of aggression. And no matter what we may think of the Kyiv government, any attempt to deny it amounts to nothing but plain victim blaming. Poland in 1939 was not a nice place either and it really did discriminate against its ethnic minorities, including Germans, but this doesn't justify or even explain Hitler's invasion. Donbas was nothing but a pretext; most of the motives for the war in 2022 were purely domestic. It was an attempt to restore the shattered support for the regime in the face of mounting social and economic crisis. Growing popular discontent in Russia forced the regime to resort to massive electoral fraud in 2020 and 2021 and to step up repression. One anti-democratic law after another was passed, thousands of people were imprisoned and many were forced to leave the country. Universities were purged of liberal and leftist teachers, independent print media was shut down and attempts were

made to impose Internet censorship. Critics of the regime were officially labelled "foreign agents" and deprived of political rights. This all happened even before the eruption of the war which was only used post-factum to justify and intensify these measures."

Kagarlitsky said that the regime's support continued to dwindle due to its own incompetence and the global crisis of neoliberalism affecting Russia and many other nations. The ruling elite desperately sought a remedy to re-establish societal cohesion.

Putin's circle and propaganda openly advocate for the elimination of Ukraine, politically and physically. This poses a growing threat, not just to Ukraine, which defends itself with Western support, but to Russian society itself.

On August 16, Kagarlitsky wrote from prison: "I think that the current arrest can be considered a recognition of the political significance of my statements. Of course, I would have preferred to be recognised in a somewhat different form, but all in good time. In the 40-odd years since my first arrest, I have learned to be patient and to realise how fickle political fortune in Russia is. The experience of the past years, it would seem, does not dispose much to optimism. But historical experience as a whole is much richer and gives much more grounds for positive expectations. Remember what Shakespeare wrote in *Macbeth*? "The night is long that never finds the day".

A global movement is actively working towards securing Kagarlitsky's freedom. □□□

(K.M. Seethi is a Senior Fellow at the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). He is also the Director of the Inter-University Centre for Social Science Research and Extension (IUCSSRE), Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala). [Source: *The Wire*]

frontier

Vol. 56 : Nos. 17-20

October 22-November 18, 2023

Price : Rs. 50

Celebrating 55 years of frontier

Founder-Editor : SAMAR SEN

Autumn Number 2023

Mass Rebellion, No Revolution-3 • First International and its Contemporary Relevance *by* Marcello Musto-4 • Bishnu Dey and Das Kapital *by* Asok Chattopadhyay • Preparation of the 1947 Draft of the Programme of the CPSU(B) *by* Vijay Singh-8 • Marxism, Capitalism and Democracy *by* Arup Baisya-12 • Ascendancy of Capitalism in China *by* Harsh Thakor-16 • Markets and Democracy: A Brewing Crisis *by* Anup Sinha-18 • South Asia in Crisis *by* Sushil Khanna-23 • Revamping Indian Agriculture *by* I Satya Sundaram-28 • Gopal Sen: the Murder of a Vice-Chancellor *by* Amit Bhattacharya-32 • The Future of the War in Ukraine *by* Sumanta Banerjee-40 • Hindutva Sleeping Cell in Congress *by* Shamsul Islam-43 • Of Lay-offs and Retrenchment *by* Nityananda Ghosh-45 • Modi's Statecraft *by* Himanshu Roy-47 • India's DNA *by* Ashok Nag-50 • How Muslim Ghettos Emerged in Twentieth-century Calcutta *by* Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay-53 • Early Communist Activism in Kolkata *by* Farooque Chowdhury-60 • Communalism, Fundamentalism and Obscurantism *by* Alope Mukherjee-65 • A Discourse on 'Riot Politics' in Gujarat *by* Arup Kumar Sen-67 • Cooperatives: Dream and Reality *by* Sukanta Sarkar-68 • World Lacks Any Credible Institutional Capacity to Deal with Climate Change *by* Vinod Mubayi-74 • Parallel Economy Continues to Flourish *by* Manas Bakshi-77 • A Poet against Fascism *by* A C-79 • Why Not Uniform Economic Code? *by* Ranganayakamma-81 • Sedition Law-a British Legacy *by* I M Sharma-82 • Back Story of Covid-19-Pandemic or Plandemic? *by* Pranjali Bandhu-85 • Bhagat Singh in Canada *by* Chaman Lal-90 • Political Economy of Speed Rail in Kerala *by* KT Rammohan-94 • Continuing Decline of Bengal Economy *by* Atanu Chakravarty-97 • D D Kosambi Research Foundation *by* Kobad Ghandy-100 • Ranajit Guha, Subaltern School and Anthropology in India *by* Abhijit Guha-102 • Jaduguda Uranium Mining Cluster *by* Bernard D'Mello-108 • Climate Change, Peak Oil, Inequality *by* Sagar Dhara-112 • Transition Town Movement *by* T Vijayendra-119 • Condition of Prisons and Prisoners *by* Aurobindo Ghose-124 • Boris Kagarlitsky in New 'Gulag' *by* K M Seethi-129

Editor : TIMIR BASU

Assistant Editor : Subhasis Mukherjee

Published weekly for Germinal Publications Pvt. Ltd. by Sharmistha Dutta from 44, Balaram Dey Street, Kolkata-700006 and Printed by her at LASER AID, 35A/3, Biplabi Barin Ghosh Sarani, Kolkata-700067

E-mail : frontierweekly@yahoo.co.in / frontierweekly@hotmail.com • Website : www.frontierweekly.com

Telephone : (033) 2530-0065

[Typeset by THE D-COMLASER, 60 Sikdar Bagan Street, Kolkata-700004, Phone : 98361-58319]

With best compliments from :

SENGUPTA & SENGUPTA PRIVATE LIMITED

REGD OFFICE :
KAMALALAYA CENTRE
156A, Lenin Sarani
3rd Floor, Room No. 305
Kolkata 700013
Phone : 2236-6590, 2237-8329


AAKAR BOOKS
www.aakarbooks.com

NEW RELEASES 2023

<p>THE WAR AGAINST THE COMMONS: Dispossession and Resistance in the Making of Capitalism Ian Angus ISBN 9789350028230, Paperback, Rs.795</p> <p>A potent antidote to the naturalization of capitalist property relations. This book reveals the long history of struggle against the expropriation of land and labor that is at the root of current social and ecological crises. This history is important, not only to better understand today's world, but to better imagine the future we require—beyond capital's deadly, imperial grip on the earth.</p> 	<p>THE ROBBERY OF NATURE: Capitalism and the Ecological Rift John Bellamy Foster & Brett Clark ISBN 9789350028148, Paperback, Rs.795</p> <p>Long recognized as leading theorists of ecocriticism, Bellamy Foster and Clark here extend their "metabolic rift" paradigm to an impressive range of issues, including gender, food, British neo-imperialism in Ireland, "alienated speciesism," the theory of value, and the meaning of work. The result is a powerful case that capitalism is inextricably bound up with the robbery of nature and constitutes the paramount obstacle to life on Earth as we know it.</p> 
<p>KARL MARX AND THE BIRTH OF MODERN SOCIETY: The Life of Marx and the Development of His Work (Vol. I: 1818-1841) Michael Heinrich ISBN 9789350028223, Paperback, Rs.995</p> <p>This first volume of Heinrich's Marx biography is the most comprehensive presentation of the life and work of the early Marx (from 1818 to 1841) available in English. His deep knowledge of the young Marx's initial forays into political theory and philosophy provides not merely a personal narrative but the biography of an idea, as we become witness to Marx's effort to discover the idea of freedom that is imminent in reality. We finally have a Marx biography that does justice to the complexity and multi-dimensionality of its subject.</p> 	<p>THE THEORY OF BASIC STRUCTURE: Saviour of the Constitution and Democracy Vijay Kumar ISBN 9789350028278, Hardcover, Rs.595</p> <p>The present book seeks to re-evaluate the theory of basic structure at the theoretical level in the light of spirit of writings on unamendability of the foundational principles of the Constitution in the recent times from the larger canvas of democratic constitutionalism. Therefore, this book is as much an exercise in political theory as in constitutional jurisprudence. After straddling both the domain of case law and theoretical exploration, the book argues the features of basic structure delineated by the Supreme Court on case to case basis in the last 50 years correspond with the Idea of India.</p> 
<p>HOW TO READ MARX'S 'CAPITAL': : Commentary and Explanations on the Beginning Chapters Michael Heinrich ISBN 9789350028131, Paperback, Rs.895</p> <p>This fine book by one of the foremost living Marx scholars equips readers to better draw on Marx's writing in the way Marx would have wanted – as a body of ideas to help us think for ourselves. With accessible prose and conceptual rigor, How to Read Marx's 'Capital' clarifies Marx's masterwork, without sacrificing either nuance or complexity. Heinrich's book will help readers new and old to better understand Capital and thus capitalism's ongoing generation of human misery. The book makes a major contribution to today's exciting renewal of Marxist inquiry...</p> 	<p>INEQUALITY, CLASS AND ECONOMICS Eric Schutz ISBN 9789350028247, Paperback, Rs.895</p> <p>Eric Schutz explains his arguments clearly and cogently, writing chapters with beautifully crafted economic theory and empirics—all out of a desire for enhancing the common good, reestablishing bonds of community and trust, and ultimate concern for the health of the eco-social system. Eric Schutz acts as a Public Intellectual, much like Paul M. Sweezy, Paul Baran before him, in explaining the world's greater concentrations of power & inequality that reduce the quality of life & standard of living of the citizens as well as quality of the biosocial environment.</p> 
<p>THE RISE OF CIVILIZATION IN INDIA AND PAKISTAN R.G. Collingwood ISBN 9788185618722, Paperback, Rs.1395</p> <p>The authors have completely revised and rewritten their earlier work to present an integrated and dynamic account of human culture in South Asia. The authors trace the origins and development of culture in India and Pakistan from its earliest roots in Palaeolithic times, through the rise and disintegration of the great Indus Civilization to the emergence of regional cultures, and the arrival and spread of Indo-Aryan speaking peoples. They conclude with the early Buddhist period and the appearance of city states right across Pakistan and North India, establishing the pattern of subcontinental unity and regional diversity that was to characterize the country henceforward.</p> 	<p>BEYOND LEVIATHAN: Critique of the State István Mészáros (edited by Joh B Foster) ISBN 9789350028124, Paperback, Rs.895</p> <p>István Mészáros was one of the greatest political theorists of the twentieth century. Left unfinished at the time of his death, Beyond Leviathan is written on the magisterial scale of his previous book, Beyond Capital, and meant to complement that work. It focuses on the transcendence of the state, along with the transcendence of capital and alienated labor, while traversing the history of political theory from Plato to the present. Aristotle, More, Machiavelli, and Vico are only a few of the thinkers discussed in depth. The larger objective of this work is no less than to develop a full-fledged critique of the state, in the Marxian tradition, and set against the critique of capital.</p> 


AAKAR BOOKS

49, Street No.14, Pratap Nagar, Mayur Vihar, Phase I, Delhi 110091
 T: 22795641, 22795505; Web www.aakarbooks.com, Email aakarbooks@gmail.com

New Book on Eco-Socialism**Eco-Socialism or
“Green” Capitalism?****Collected Writings of Saral Sarkar**

Explanations,
Elaborations and
Interventions

Vol. I and Vol. II

In these two volumes Saral Sarkar presents most of his political and political-economic essays and articles written in the personal computer age.

**Eco-Socialism or
“Green” Capitalism?**

Collected Writings of
Saral Sarkar

Explanations,
Elaborations, and
Interventions

Volume I

Edited by Ernst Schriebl

Back cover text

After the ignominious fall of the classical Soviet model of “socialism” in the early 1990s, socialists, communists, and all other kinds of Leftists had felt to have been left in the lurch. With his book *Eco-Socialism or Eco-Capitalism? A Critical Analysis of Humanity’s Fundamental Choices* (1999), Saral Sarkar presented and laid the theoretical foundation of a new conception of socialism, which convinced because it organically synthesized the newly arisen imperative of ecological sustainability and the old ideal of equality among members of humanity.

On their part, all opponents of any kind of socialism have also been trying to somehow accommodate the inexorable insights into and demands of true ecological sustainability in extant conceptions of capitalism. What they have achieved is not a synthesis, but merely a fake and self-contradictory phrase that does not deserve the prefix “Eco-”, and should properly be called “Green” Capitalism. But they succeeded in hoodwinking millions of worried human beings all over the world.

In the last thirty years, Sarkar has been relentlessly trying through speeches and writings to counter their misconceptions of the ecological and social imperatives. In the present two volumes of his *Collected Writings*, readers will find some of the fruits of his endeavor.

Brief biography of author

Saral Sarkar was born in 1936 in a village of West Bengal, India. After graduating from the University of Calcutta (Kolkata), he studied German language and literature for five years at the Goethe Institute in India and Germany. From 1966 to 1981, he was lecturer in German at the Goethe Institute in Hyderabad, India.

Since 1982, he has been living in Cologne, Germany, where he has been active in the Green Movement, Anti-Globalization Movement, and all kinds of ecological and leftist movements. He was member of the Green Party of Germany from 1982 to 1987, but left the party in deep disappointment.

Over the years, Sarkar has taken part in many discussions and debates in the above-mentioned areas and published widely in political journals in India, Europe, and the American Continent.

His basal theoretical work *“Eco-Socialism or Eco-Capitalism? A Critical Analysis of Humanity’s Fundamental Choices”* (1999, London) has also been published in German, French (in internet), Chinese and Japanese.

His other major works are: *Green-Alternative Politics in West Germany*, Vol. I & II (1993, 1994, Tokyo), and *The Crises of Capitalism – A Different Study of Political Economy* (2012, Berkeley), which was originally published in German (2010, Neu-Ulm).

How to buy : The books can be ordered via the usual distribution channels (Amazon or other internet platforms, your local bookseller). For anyone who uses or prefers e-books: there are also rather inexpensive e-book versions available as well. Volume I is already available as an e-book, Volume 2 will be available soon (starting around the beginning of October) as an e-book.

