

frontier

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RSS Celebrates 100 Years

THE RASHTRIYA SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH (RSS), FOUNDED IN 1925, recently marked its centenary. In recent decades, it grabbed power and moved into the centre stage, becoming a dominant force in Indian politics, primarily through its affiliations with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has governed India for much of the last two decades. Prime Minister Narendra Modi took special interest in glorifying RSS and its architects. In truth due to RSS Modi is continuing as Prime Minister.

The BJP's close ties to the RSS have been a source of both power and controversy, particularly as the BJP has celebrated key figures in the RSS's ideological pantheon. Among these figures are men whose legacy is entwined with an extremist, perverted version of Hindu nationalism that stands in stark contrast to the democratic values enshrined in the Indian Constitution.

For those familiar with the RSS's founding principles, it is no surprise that the BJP has publicly honoured figures such as V.D. Savarkar, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, and M.S. Golwalkar, three men who shaped the ideological backbone of the organisation. Their birthdays have been celebrated as national holidays, and their philosophies have been subtly, and at times explicitly, woven into the fabric of India's political discourse. However, what is far more troubling is how the government has validated these controversial figures and their deeply exclusionary and extremist views.

At the heart of the RSS's ideology is Hindutva, a vision of India where the Hindu identity, narrowly defined, reigns supreme. This concept, first articulated by Savarkar in the 1920s, asserts that India is a land exclusively for Hindus, a view that explicitly marginalises religious minorities—particularly Muslims and Christians.

Savarkar's ideological heirs, like Golwalkar, took this doctrine even further. Golwalkar himself was often likened to fascist thinkers such as Hitler, particularly due to his endorsement of the idea of racial superiority. The RSS's rejection of India's secular, pluralistic Constitution has been a persistent thread throughout its history.

As the BJP acts as the RSS's political arm, the tension between its ideological vision and the principles of the Indian state has grown more pronounced. The BJP's champions of Hindutva—Savarkar, Golwalkar, and their ilk—offer a vision of India where religious and cultural homogeneity are paramount, and the political establishment's embrace of this vision sends

a message that the government's commitment to secularism is waning.

Golwalkar's call for a "homogenous society," in which the identity of the majority religious group is elevated as the ultimate form of devotion, is deeply troubling in a democratic society. When the ruling party backs these views, they embolden those who subscribe to

them, empowering them to police society, impose their beliefs on others, and silence those who disagree. The validation of such rhetoric by the state has profound implications, not just for the political landscape but for the very nature of public discourse and social harmony.

When the BJP, the political arm of this ideological movement, celebrates Golwalkar's life and writ-

ings, it is not simply honouring a historical figure; it is endorsing a worldview that has the potential to divide the nation along increasingly dangerous lines. This ideological shift—an embrace of religious and cultural homogeneity—signals a pivot away from the pluralism that has long been at the heart of India's national identity. □□□

[Contributed]

COMMENT

Assault on Health and Education

THE PRIVATISATION OF HEALTH-care has turned illness into a business; business of sickness. While it generates massive profits for private medical corporations, pharmaceutical companies, and health insurance providers, it does so at the expense of people's health and well-being. Managerialism in healthcare has not improved the efficiency of medical care delivery for those in need; instead, it has bureaucratised patient care and delayed treatment under the guise of creating multiple layers of appointments, investigations, reporting, and treatment processes. Moreover, the privatisation of healthcare has expanded the profit empires of pharmaceutical and insurance companies. In essence, privatisation serves corporate interests while endangering human health by delaying timely health care and treatment.

In the same way, the privatisation of education—much like healthcare—has opened the doors for managerialism in universities and higher education institutions. Under the banner of industry-academia collaboration, a class of individuals has entered universities who have little or nothing to contribute to the growth of the teaching and learning environment. These individuals become managers of teaching and

learning without any experience or training in knowledge production or dissemination. Many of them have never taught a class or written a single page of research, yet they shape policies on the quality of teaching and research. This managerial disaster is often justified in the name of efficiency and austerity, allowing managers to profit at the expense of teaching and learning—and at the cost of precarious students and staff.

University managers have begun awarding themselves professorial titles without making any meaningful contribution to the production or dissemination of knowledge, either within or beyond university structures. A colleague—a teacher and researcher who has worked in higher education for a long time—shared her frustration with the increasingly managerial nature of universities and the rise of a clientelist culture, where managers not only receive undeserved academic promotions but also grant promotions based on personal networks and client relationships.

Such trends of managerial overreach are not confined to universities in the UK. The profit-driven dominance of managerial culture across universities and institutions of higher learning represents one of the greatest threats to knowledge pro-

duction and the learning environment necessary for skill development and knowledge transfer. This managerialist approach undermines the essential conditions for the growth of critical scholarship—scholarship that is vital for the social, political, and economic transformation of society. Managers increasingly view the curriculum as a product, teachers as sellers, and students as consumers, a perspective that fundamentally erodes the very idea and purpose of higher education.

The managerial assault on health and education is deliberately designed to produce weak and compliant bodies and minds—individuals who cannot question the powers that domesticate their lives, dominate their labour, and control their creativity to sustain an unjust and exploitative rent-seeking system known as capitalism. This system, often embodied by markets, states, and governments, thrives on such managerial control. Therefore, the managerial assault is, at its core, a capitalist assault on health and education—one that seeks profit and perpetuates a rent-seeking culture devoid of the collective foundations of knowledge, consciousness, and skill. □□□

[Contributed by Bhabani Shankar Nayak]

For **Frontier** Contact

DHYANBINDU

COLLEGE SQUARE

NOTE

Indian Judiciary is Dying

Bhabani Shankar Nayak writes:

STRUCTURALLY, THE FEDERAL judicial system in India is organised from the lower courts and district and sessions courts to the High Courts and the Supreme Court. These courts derive their authority and legitimacy from the secular Constitution of India, which establishes a unified judicial system. The post-colonial judicial framework emerged from anti-colonial struggles led by the Indian working masses, who aimed to establish a constitutionally mandated unitary federal system to ensure the free, fair, and independent delivery of justice without any form of discrimination based on class, caste, gender, sexuality, religion, region, or socio-political status. This independent and impartial judicial system, based on *Niti* (rule of law) and *Nyaya* (justice), provided much-needed popular legitimacy to the Indian courts among the masses. Courts were regarded as above suspicion in the public eye, which gave them an invisible authority that enabled the judiciary to deliver justice without fear or favour.

However, the independence, legitimacy, and authority of the courts have declined over the years due to marketisation and corporatisation, communalisation, political compromises with authoritarian leadership, and religious bias invoked in the name of defending nationalism and mass sentiment in the delivery of justice.

The commercialisation and marketisation of legal practice have further ruined the delivery of justice in India as access and denial to justice and courts depends on the ability to pay for an experienced and well qualified lawyer. This market

principles of accessibility to court of law based on purchasing power of the citizens undermined the very principles of universality of rule of law and justice. The rich and powerful find it easier to access to courts than the working poor. Therefore, majority of poor, marginalised and unprivileged social groups are suffering in Indian prisons due to the failure of courts in India. It allows ruling class intellectuals to argue that there is a link between poverty and crime.

Such a casual analysis not only criminalises working poor without any form of justification but also fails to understand the conditions created by the class, caste, gender, regional, urban and educational bias within Indian judicial practice.

The poor and marginalised are not criminals; rather, they suffer under a legal system that criminalises their everyday lives to legitimise the exploitation of their labour. This occurs within a capitalist social, economic, and political order that is fundamentally unfair, as it is built on exploiting profit from both labour and nature. The legalisation of such a system of delivering justice undermines the credibility of courts in India.

The unitary federal practice and centralised constitutional provisions allow the central government, its institutional provisions and higher courts to take certain autocratic measures to uphold the interests of capital over people that undermine both the federal structure and constitutional democracy in India. From the era of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of the Congress Party to that of Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the Bharatiya Janata Party, India has witnessed democratic degeneration, divisive and

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discriminatory politics which manifests within judicial practices through the erosion of the rule of law and the delivery of justice.

Both governing and non-governing Indian elites seek to maintain a weak and compliant judicial system that serves their interests and preserves their power through judicial means. Consequently, different forms of crime are allowed to flourish in the country. A compromised and criminal system relies on a criminalised society for its survival, whereas an independent, impartial, and strong judiciary challenges the interests of dominant classes and castes in India. □□□

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THEORY AND PRACTICE

Cohesive Development through Alternative Development Paradigm

Bharat Patankar

IT WAS A VERY GREAT EXPERIENCE to read Prof Sunil Ray's book 'Birth of an Alternative Development Paradigm-Unfolding of Transformative Mode of Production' [Germinal Publications Pvt Ltd. 44, Balaram Dey Street, Kolkata-700006, Price: 250 INR, Contact 8240016324].

In fact, at many instances while I was reading, I thought as if I am reading my own writing on the "Alternative Development Paradigm"!! This was particularly true when I was reading the beginning of the Part III which says, "The primary condition for cohesive development is social cohesion among individuals with a sense of community and commitment to the common objective based on collective understanding and shared consciousness. It is this common objective that binds individuals together despite differences that might exist between them. However, this can happen only if common objective never falls in line with the existing power structure which is undemocratic and exploitative and yields powerlessness and

deprivation of majority. In other words, no social cohesion can ensure cohesive development as an alternative development paradigm if it fails to recognise the debilitating impact of the existing power structure on it."

This theoretical presentation is almost the same as our understanding on the basis of which we are implementing aspects alternative development paradigm. People's movement has forced the government to treat water as a common pool resource and agree to the idea of equitable water use for agriculture irrespective of land holding. Because of this lakhs of families have gained the right to use water for agriculture in an equitable manner irrespective of land ownership and thus ensuring their livelihoods.

This concept became the base for giving renewable alternative to the coal based power projects of Tatas and Ambanis and a successful people's movement which forced the cancelation of non-renewable resource based power projects.

People are becoming successful in gradually taking collective control of managing water, forest, and land through eco-development committees etc.

In short Prof Sunil Ray's book has presented almost the same theoretical perspective which is similar to *our perspective and social practice*. We hope that his book, with this perspective, brings together the perspectives and practices of intellectuals and people's movements at global level.

The concept of the, "Alternative Development Paradigm" is understood

in various different ways. Some perspectives or viewpoints just vehemently oppose all aspects of the established, "non-renewables based development paradigm" "which is basically controlled by private and state capital and headed by a chain of multinational monopoly capital. But these perspectives do not do the basic analysis of its nature and do not provide the detailed alternative perspective. They often put forward the pre-capitalist forms of agricultural production practices and production processes of that era as an alternative. It is impossible to fulfil even the minimum needs of the population today in a satisfactory manner if we really generalise these pre-capitalist production processes. We have to use most advanced production processes in agriculture as well as non-agricultural production sectors which are based on renewables, ecologically sound and are also non-polluting in character. At the same time, it is also true that we have to have enough production to meet various basic needs.

There are problems with the so-called renewable energy generation alternatives. Wind Mills are supposed to be renewable energy alternative. But the whole structure of the wind mills is made up of non-renewable materials. Same is the case with the solar energy generation systems. These could be considered as transitory systems while going towards total renewable systems. But it does not look like if there are any efforts made in this direction. So, question is how we can make a transition towards almost total renewables. This riddle could be solved only through the social movements and social practices. Problem of going towards the total organic farming falls in the same category. Success of these processes is related to the social practices of the majority of

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the social sections who needs this transition for getting liberated from all types of exploitations.

Book says very significant things about this problematic. Sunil Ray says in the book, "It is not that powerlessness is confined to the economic aspect of human life alone and hence the talk about monolithic class division. It is equally important to recognise how in other aspects of life including social, cultural, political, environmental, etc subordinate groups are excluded from various forms of power....The task of the subordinate groups, therefore, is to overcome the cultural hegemony of dominant groups, preserve cultural diversity and ensure all social groups to have a voice through democratic means such as participation, dialogue, etc as ruling by obeying comes into play."

He further says, "Hence cohesive development, in the present context, is conceived as an alternative development paradigm that replaces the logic of capital as it works in the

capitalist system with the new one that seeks to establish radically different social metabolic order based on the principle of solidarity between humans on the one hand and humans and nature on the other...."

Sunil Ray takes a theoretical approach which integrates theory and practice of the people's movement. He says, "...fundamental tenets of epistemological base of the cohesive development as emerging from radical movements and transformative initiatives." He talks about: 1) holistic cosmovision with diversity, 2) solidarity between humans and humans and nature, 3) equity and justice for harmony, 4) principle of sufficiency, 5) new logic of capital, 6) participatory democracy and communal self-management, 7) reciprocal altruism, 8) expansion of commons, and 9) qualitative metamorphosis. It is needlessly to mention that each of these tenets is interdependent as a rational totality and reinforce one another for constructing an alternative paradigm."

Except for 'new logic of capital', all other tenets are practised today in new social movements in India about which Dr Gail Omvedt had written a book some years back. We are part of these moments including equitable water distribution for drinking and agriculture uses of the rural population instead of water getting controlled by rural elites and industries. The other areas are struggles for environmentally healthy energy generation in place of fossil fuel based generation by giving people's alternatives and movements for forest rights of people and healthy relationship between water-forest-land and humans. We are also part of caste annihilation movements, women's liberation movements, alternative people's cultural movements etc. The perspective put forward in the book will stimulate the process of live dialogue and mutual exchange of knowledge between people's movements and the academia. □□□

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REVIEW ARTICLE

"A Black Umbrella and a White Man"

Niloy Samanta

IN THE PLAY *MONIRAM Dewan*, there's a conversation between Captain Holroyd and Mohan Hazarika. Hazarika says, "The entire populace is swayed by Moniram Dewan's words. Everyone has taken up arms to kill the white monkeys." Holroyd responds, "What did you say, Hazarika? Are you mocking us by calling us white monkeys?" Hazarika replies, "No, sir. Your humble servant hasn't said such a thing. I am merely conveying what the subjects are saying."

During my last visit to Assam, I bought a copy of the play *Moniram Dewan*. The term "white monkey" particularly caught my attention, so

I made a mental note of it. The colour-based distinction between black and white exists even today—and it existed back then too. But from time to time, we encounter certain experiences that compel us to reconsider our preconceived notions. If we fail to do so, we risk falling prey to what's known as confirmation bias.

When we reflect on the British colonial era, a sense of anger or a desire for retribution against the white rulers can naturally arise within us. The speech delivered by Member of Parliament Shashi Tharoor at the Oxford Union had gone immensely viral for this very reason.

Humans are inherently weak creatures. Apart from their intellectual capacity, in most other aspects, humans are weaker than many other beings. That's why, in many situations, people seek divine refuge. As Chaliha once said, if we imagine a society where people accept only those things backed by scientific facts and evidence, such a society would be nothing more than a utopian dream.

Even the term scientific temperament is often contentious. You or I, despite being educated in modern science, may have consumed medicines prescribed by doctors in the past that are now banned. Perhaps the research of that time was flawed, and newer research has now presented new evidence. Newton's theory of gravity, too, was redefined through Einstein's theory of space-time cur-

vature. Science, of course, is self-correcting—it evolves over time and revises itself.

Our daily experiences significantly impact our brain. Research has shown that learning a foreign language or acquiring a new skill can alter the brain in new ways. Neuroplasticity is the brain's lifelong ability to develop new connections. One study found that taxi drivers in England had more grey matter in the hippocampus—a region of the brain involved in spatial navigation and memory. These taxi drivers had to memorise the entire layout of London's streets, which resulted in a larger hippocampus compared to others.

In essence, our brain is constantly changing. So, can we use the brain's neuroplasticity to transform a negative mind-set into a positive one?

One known way to develop a positive mind-set is through meditation. People who meditate regularly—like Buddhist monks—have neural structures that differ from those of the average person. "Certain parts of their brain are capable of experiencing much higher levels of empathy and awareness than ordinary individuals." A significant study conducted in 2008 found that experienced meditators showed greater brain activity than less experienced individuals when exposed to emotionally charged sounds like crying or laughter. It was observed that meditation had, in fact, trained them to be more empathetic toward others.

Although often overlooked, the significance of these findings is especially relevant today. We live in a time marked by growing intolerance.

There's a disconnect with anyone who holds differing ideologies—"they are wrong, we are right." Such thinking has deepened religious and ideological divides. Meditation gradually alters the brain. Meditators tend to respond to everyday events with calmness, empathy, and mindfulness. Meditation activates those regions of the brain associated with compassion and empathy.

If we do not begin by changing ourselves first, then blaming society, the administration, or those in power for social problems becomes nothing more than a way to evade responsibility. After all, governments and political parties come and go. True change is only possible through a transformation of the mind—perhaps that's why Mahatma Gandhi once said, "By persistently trying to attain self-purification, I have been able to develop, to some extent, the capacity to hear 'the still small voice within' more clearly and precisely." Gandhi believed that without self-purification, no lasting solution to social issues was possible. He may not have known much neuroscience in his time, but today we understand—albeit partially—that our brain is plastic, meaning such inner transformation is possible.

First, we must be able to acknowledge that each of us, to varying degrees, carries biases—and we must at least be willing to let them go. Suppose you manage to calm your ego and commit to changing yourself first. Now, let's explore a highly effective technique to support this process: it's called priming.

To understand priming, we must refer to some translated insights from Daniel Kahneman's book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*.

"Imagine you're shown a few incomplete words. What would you think when you see 'so_p'? Perhaps nothing in particular. But what if you had seen the word 'cat' just

before that? Then you are more likely to complete 'so_p' as 'soup'. This process is called priming. That is, instead of thinking of 'soap', you thought of 'soup'."

We fall under the influence of priming when the presence of a word, event, or concept subtly compels us to think of other related ideas. If, instead of seeing 'cat', you had seen the word 'shower', you would likely have completed the word as 'soap'.

Priming doesn't just affect our thoughts—it also influences our actions. Just as the mind is influenced by certain words or ideas, so too is the body.

In one study, participants were primed with words associated with old age—such as "Florida" and "wrinkle"—and it was observed that their walking pace slowed down compared to usual. They began to walk like elderly individuals. Strikingly, this process was entirely unconscious—it occurred without their awareness.

This priming reveals that we are never fully conscious in our actions, decisions, and choices. In reality, at every moment, we are being "primed" by countless social and cultural factors. Just like other social influences, priming can shape an individual's thoughts, and thus their choices, judgments, and behaviours—which in turn reflect back into society, heavily influencing the environment we live in.

If, day and night, you keep hearing communal rhetoric from political leaders, and repeatedly see or hear on social media or television that your religion is superior to others, you too become unconsciously primed to think in that same direction.

Everyone holds their own ideals and makes relentless efforts to promote and expand them. Politicians, however, often abandon their individuality and adopt opportunistic positions. There is certainly nothing inherently wrong with this—as long

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MYTHRY BOOK HOUSE

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as it does not infringe upon people's fundamental rights.

But the so-called 'moral policing' by religious organisations is increasingly becoming an assault on individual freedom. When this issue was mentioned on social media, a professor from Assam commented, "Are you trying to appear secular by criticising Hindutva organisations?" Perhaps the professor has not yet understood that there is no place for fanaticism in Hinduism itself, which is why such words, born of anger and agitation, were spoken.

"What Gandhi said about Hinduism and his thoughts on it have not been discussed as much as they should have been, and that is truly unfortunate. In the university where I conduct my research, an annual Gandhi Essay Competition is held for school students. I voluntarily took

up the task of evaluating a few of the essays. Witnessing the reverence Gandhi's ideals receive in Western countries, while they are often ridiculed in his own homeland, leaves me deeply moved."

All these theoretical analyses can be found in the book "*A Black Umbrella and a White Man*".* This is a collection [in *Asomiya*] of Debanjan Borthakur's previously published essays in newspapers and journals, written from a *psychological perspective*. For the first time, psychological discussions of Assam and India's political and social issues are compiled in this anthology.

Debanjan Borthakur is a researcher and teacher in the fields of psychology and neuroscience. He holds postgraduate degrees from McMaster University in Canada and Bowdoin College in the United

States. Currently, he is teaching at the University of Toronto while pursuing his PhD research. His research articles include engaging topics in social and political psychology.

Not just as a scholar, he has also been contributing to nearly all major Assamese newspapers and journals, offering psychological analyses of Assam's socio-political issues. He is actively involved in topics such as animal rights, human rights, and mental health in the workplace. He works on these issues both nationally and internationally, publishing articles and essays. □□□

[*]"*Ata Kola Sati Aru Ajon Boga Manuh*" An Assamese book written by Debanjan Borthakur, published by Rupjyoti Devnath on behalf of Jagaran Sahitya Prakashan Price 275]

[Niloy Samanta, What's app: 8017224404]

A STORY OF OMISSIONS

Narendra Modi on Bhupen Hazarika

Abhijit Guha

ATRIBUTE TO BHUPENDA" an article published in *The Statesman* on 07/09/2025 (p.7) on the occasion of the singer's birth centenary celebrations, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is informative but lacked a lot of important facts in the life of the great folk singer of India who hailed from Assam.

In the tribute the Prime Minister mentioned that Hazarika never became a "career politician" although he was elected an independent MLA from a constituency in Assam in 1967 and served as an MLA (Independent) during 1967-72. True. But it was not also true that Bhupen Hazarika had no political ideology. While in the US, Hazarika was deeply influenced by American folk music as a tool of protest and resistance. What Prime Minister Modi particu-

larly did not mention was that Bhupen Hazarika (1926-2011) was also an activist in the cultural front of the then Communist Party of India at Calcutta. Hazarika was closely associated with the leftist Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) soon after returning from the US in 1953 and became the Secretary of the Reception Committee of the Third All Assam Conference of IPTA, held in Guwahati in 1955 (<https://indianculture.gov.in/stories/bard-brahmaputra-dr-bhupen-hazarika>).

Much later Bhupen Hazarika in an interview with rediff told:

'I used to do many road shows before—one man shows from village to village. That's how I became Bhupen Hazarika. During those shows I have met many angry young men who have said to me, "*Dada*

gana chod do aur gun le lo," (Leave your song and pick up the gun). I told them that my *gaan* (song) is my gun. At this age I could not go to the jungles to show that I loved my country. I can't prove that I love Assam by only getting angry'. (<https://m.rediff.com/news/aug/06asom.htm>).

Hazarika's association with politics did not end there. He contested as a Bharatiya Janata Party candidate in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections from the Guwahati constituency, which he lost to the Indian National Congress candidate Kirip Chaliha. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhupen_Hazarika).

The aforementioned omissions in the article of Indian Prime Minister are noteworthy. Hazarika's lyrics promoted themes of communal harmony, optimism, justice, a message of protest, revolutionary zeal and empathy amongst people. In the Government of India portal the article entitled *Bard of Brahmaputra - Dr Bhupen Hazarika* it is clearly mentioned: "His lyrics promoted

themes of communal harmony, optimism, justice, a message of protest, revolutionary zeal and empathy amongst people". Hazarika joined the famous Festival of Political Songs organised by the Socialist Unity Party of the communist East Germany during 13-19 February 1972 and a photo of the singer with Hermut Konig, a member of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany can be seen in the GOI portal. (<https://indianculture.gov.in/stories/bard-brahmaputra-dr-bhupen-hazarika>).

Before joining the right wing

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Hazarika first met the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and then the Deputy Prime Minister L K Advani and Union Health Minister Sushma Swaraj. After coming out of the meeting, he said, "I was totally convinced that for the first time in this country's history, the BJP, along with its allies, have emerged as a political force that is leading this country in the right direction" according to a *Times of India* report published on 3 March 2004.

(<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/elections/2004-news/bjp-on-right-path-says-hazarika/articleshow/535416.cms>).

He had joined the BJP ahead of 2004 Lok Sabha elections impressed by the performance of Atal Bihari Vajpayee government.

So, Bhupen Hazarika from the beginning to the end of his career was very much involved in political ideologies, first leftist and then rightist and that is the essence of the biography of this great singer. □□□

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BIASED AI

'As We Code, So We Reap'

Debanjan Borthakur

HUMAN PREJUDICE STRETCHES back millennia, and the seeds of racism and bias that people sowed long ago have now taken root and flourished within artificial intelligence. Bias existed long before machine learning algorithms emerged; whenever society invents a new technology, it inherits the prejudices and discrimination of earlier eras. In the nineteenth century, redlining maps dictated who could receive loans—systematically denying Black Americans access to mortgages, insurance, and other essential financial services. Today's credit-scoring algorithms still mirror those same exclusions. As AI extends into recruitment, administration, medicine, and the media, alarm bells are sounding: if people do not imbue their machines with ethical values, they will merely magnify their deepest biases.

Just a few days ago, this writer encountered an article generated by AI—yet its prose unmistakably reflected human prejudice. While biases introduced via "prompt framing" are easy to detect, the subtler distortions in AI run far deeper,

rooted in history. Jim Crow laws once codified racial segregation across the American South; decades later, the Homeowners' Loan Corporation produced "redlining maps" that labeled predominantly Black neighbourhoods as "hazardous," denying residents' access to loans to buy or improve homes. Those bureaucratic red lines manufactured inequality—and their legacy persists in today's data. Similar forms of institutional discrimination have appeared around the world: Canada's "Chinese Head Tax" targeted Chinese immigrants; during World War II, the United States forcibly interned Japanese Americans; and for over forty years under the guise of "scientific research," the Tuskegee syphilis study denied Black men treatment. These racist policies were enshrined in law and practice, normalising prejudice.

Why do these historical injustices matter now? Modern AI relies on vast repositories of documents—laws, court records, medical files, employment histories—that often carry those same discriminatory patterns. When people train AI models on data

imbued with old institutional inequalities, and fail to correct for them, they risk recreating those injustices at digital scale and speed.

There is alarming digital echoes of this history. In 2015, Google Photos infamously labeled images of dark-skinned individuals as "gorillas," reviving dehumanising comparisons once leveled against Black people. COMPAS, a software tool predicting recidivism, rated Black defendants as significantly higher risk than white defendants—a reflection of biased "stop-and-frisk" policing data. Amazon's automated résumé filter downgraded applications containing the word "women," revealing entrenched gender bias. In Detroit, a facial-recognition error led to the wrongful arrest of Robert Williams, a Black man, even though he was innocent. Each example underscores that AI systems mirror the biases in their training data. If history is skewed, AI will be, too.

So why isn't AI neutral? One major culprit is biased training data. As Brian Christian describes in "The Alignment Problem", facial-recognition datasets underrepresented darker-skinned faces, making the models less accurate for those groups. AI's sole objective is to maximise performance metrics—its "points"—without regard for human values. Compound-

ing this, deep neural networks contain millions of hidden parameters, rendering their decision-making processes largely opaque—even to their creators. This disconnection between AI’s optimisation targets and human ethical standards is known as the alignment problem: AI will pursue its programmed goals relentlessly, even if they conflict with values, because it lacks an emotional or moral compass. Nick Bostrom’s “paperclip maximizer” thought experiment dramatises this risk: an AI instructed solely to produce paperclips might convert the entire planet into a factory to achieve its quota. Though hypothetical, it vividly illustrates the stakes.

To guide AI toward fairness and equity, experts have proposed the RICE framework: Robustness, Interpretability, Controllability, and Ethicality. Under RICE, AI systems must operate reliably across diverse cultural and national contexts; users should understand the rationale behind AI decisions; humans must maintain ultimate control; and AI must embody moral values such as justice and equality. But can one fix bias simply by refining data and algorithms? Unless people address the broader societal inequalities, discrimination, and irregularities that underlie data, AI will continue to absorb and reproduce these injustices—perhaps even accelerating them.

Human values evolve over time, and AI must evolve in step. Artificial intelligence lacks a conscience of its own; it reflects only the information people provide. If that information is flawed, biased, or racist, AI will keep repeating history’s darkest chapters. □□□

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THE FLOTILLA MISSIONS

The Return of International Mass Solidarity

Sushovan Dhar

HISTORY PROGRESSES through moments when the moral imagination of humanity clashes with the machinery of empire. The saga of Gaza’s flotillas—civilian vessels that challenge the Israeli blockade in acts of international solidarity—has reached such a critical juncture once more. As the Sumud Flotilla set sail, carrying food, medicine, and the principle of human dignity, Israel responded not with dialogue but with force. Boats were seized, activist’s arrested, and international waters were once again transformed into a theatre of impunity. Yet, as in all imperial aggressions and narratives, repression reveals weakness rather than strength. For every ship intercepted, the idea it embodies—of global solidarity with the besieged—travels further than any navy can reach.

Since 2007, Israel has imposed a suffocating blockade on Gaza, severely restricting the availability of food, medicine, and fuel for well over two million residents. The blockade was

intensified after Hamas’ electoral victory, effectively turning the Gaza Strip into one of the most densely populated open-air prisons in the world. According to UN OCHA, over 80 per cent of Gaza’s population depends on humanitarian aid, and restrictions on imports have crippled hospitals, schools, and sanitation systems. International law condemns the blockade as collective punishment—prohibited under the Fourth Geneva Convention—yet the siege endures with Western complicity.

The sea has long been a corridor of conscience for Gaza. In August 2008, two small boats from the *Free Gaza Movement*—the *Liberty* and the *Free Gaza*—were the first to reach the enclave since 1967, breaking the naval siege with international activists and journalists on board. Their success inspired a wave of solidarity missions that followed. The most tragic of these was the *Mavi Marmara* in 2010, when Israeli commandos stormed the vessel in international waters, killing ten activists and injuring dozens. The

attack provoked worldwide outrage and made “flotilla” a synonym for resistance to apartheid.

Since then, over thirty such missions have tried to reach Gaza, including the *Women’s Boat to Gaza* in 2016 and the *Freedom Flotilla Coalition’s* multiple voyages. These voyages, whether successful or intercepted, remind people that the world does not accept the siege.

The Sumud Flotilla, whose name means ‘steadfastness’ in Arabic, strongly continues this legacy. Composed of several small vessels sailing under Scandinavian, Irish, and South African flags, it carried an international crew of activists, students, doctors, journalists, and retired seafarers. Their cargo was largely symbolic—medical kits, food parcels, books, and letters of solidarity—but the voyage was about something larger: the refusal to normalise occupation.

Sumud’s launch from a European port reignited interest in maritime resistance. Organisers from the Freedom Flotilla Coalition have already announced follow-up missions for 2025, pledging to continue “until Gaza is free.” For participants, the flotilla represents not a one-off ges-

ture but the rebirth of an internationalist conscience—echoing the spirit that once sent brigades to Spain and volunteers to anti-apartheid movements.

The Israeli state's interception of the flotilla reflects a consistent pattern: military aggression disguised as legal enforcement, sustained by Western political and economic patronage. The seizure of civilian boats in international waters, the arrest and humiliation of unarmed activists, and the systematic harassment of solidarity efforts reveal the arrogance of power and its dependency.

Israel's impunity rests on its alliances. The United States, its chief patron, supplies roughly 15 percent of Israel's military budget through aid and arms transfers. European states, too, continue to export dual-use technology despite formal bans. Between 2014 and 2022, the Indian government imported over \$1.5 billion in Israeli drones, missiles, and surveillance systems. The economic circuits of occupation stretch far beyond Tel Aviv.

For one thing even the most powerful empire cannot permanently silence the voices of conscience. The criminalisation of solidarity recalls colonial precedents—the imprisonment of anti-slavery campaigners, the persecution of international volunteers in Spain, and the suppression of anti-apartheid networks. History shows that repression, when directed against humanity's moral sense, tends to universalise dissent rather than extinguish it.

The world's response to the Sumud attack was immediate. Governments across Latin America, Africa, and parts of Europe condemned Israel's aggression and called for an end to the blockade. South Africa's foreign ministry invoked parallels to its struggle against apartheid, while Chile, Colombia, and Bolivia issued joint statements of protest.

Yet the deeper resonance came from below—from movements, not

ministries. Trade unions, student groups, and faith groups organised vigils, boycotts, and marches across continents. It was heartening to see working-class actions in support of Gaza, as in Italy and Spain, dockworkers refused to handle Israeli cargo ships. In London, thousands gathered outside Downing Street demanding sanctions. Across the Latin American continent, protest mobilisations combined demands for a Gaza ceasefire with critiques of neoliberal austerity at home, linking imperial violence abroad with exploitation at home.

These mobilisations reveal a new phase in global politics: one where public morality increasingly diverges from state policy. The solidarity networks forming in response to Gaza's siege echo the moral energy that once animated anti-war and anti-apartheid movements. They also signal that internationalism—long dismissed as outdated—is returning as a living practice, especially among youth and workers' movements.

Inside Gaza, activists and civil-society groups welcomed the flotilla as both a material and moral lifeline. Statements from organisations such as the Al-Mezan Centre for Human Rights and the Palestinian Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue expressed gratitude for the initiative, framing it as an extension of Palestinian steadfastness (*sumud*). "These boats remind us that the sea still carries hope," one statement declared, "and that freedom cannot be quarantined."

The flotilla's symbolism lies in transforming Gaza's isolation into a shared global responsibility. Every intercepted boat amplifies the Palestinians' right to live, return, and resist dehumanisation. The Sumud Flotilla's defiance, like the continued protests in Rafah and Khan Younis, expresses the same unbroken logic of resistance: that to exist in dignity under occupation is itself a form of revolt.

The flotilla crisis has also starkly pointed out the widening gap be-

tween governments and their citizens. The western ruling classes—entwined with arms lobbies and ideological alliances—remain steadfast in their support for Israel. Yet across universities, unions, and churches, public opinion is shifting. Polls in the United Kingdom and the United States now show majorities favouring a ceasefire and questioning their unconditional support for Israel.

Meanwhile, the Global South is asserting a moral and political independence unseen since the 1970s. South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice, and the widespread endorsements it received from states in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, show how anti-colonial memory endures. Millions across these regions perceive the Palestinian cause not as a foreign issue but as one that mirrors their own histories of dispossession. Today, it carries the same moral weight that was once held by anti-apartheid and anti-imperialist struggles.

Unfortunately, in this global resurgence of solidarity, India stands as a tragic exception. Burying its own history of leading the anti-colonial and Non-Aligned solidarity, the Indian state has moved decisively toward alignment with Israel. The shift began in the 1990s but has accelerated under the Modi regime, transforming from a diplomatic relationship into an ideological partnership.

Zionism and Hindutva share a vocabulary of ethno-religious supremacy, militarised nationalism, and Islamophobia. India is now the largest purchaser of Israeli arms after the United States, accounting for roughly 45 percent of Israel's defence exports. Joint ventures in drone manufacturing, cyber security, and border surveillance have expanded rapidly. The technologies of occupation in Palestine find replicas along India's own militarised borders and in Kashmir's surveillance systems.

Equally striking is the moral silence. The ruling BJP and the main

opposition parties have both failed to condemn Israel's actions in Gaza. Fearing the label of "anti-national", even once-vocal liberal and secular commentators have retreated into silence. The Indian media, awash in pro-Israel commentary, mirrors the authoritarian alignment between Zionism and Hindutva.

This silence contrasts sharply with India's past. The Nehru-era government opposed Israel's UN membership, and India's early foreign policy consistently linked anti-colonial freedom at home with Palestinian self-determination. That heritage, though faint, survives today only in the statements of the Left and scattered street protests.

Still, resistance persists. Across Indian campuses and cities, small but determined groups—student unions, left parties and organisations, workers' unions, and feminist collectives—have organised rallies, teach-ins, and fundraisers for Gaza. Their numbers are still modest, but their significance is immense. These gatherings, however small in stature, represent the spirit of an older and nobler tradition—the spirit of internationalism and anti-imperialism. Each gathering reasserts the principle that internationalism is not an abstraction but a practice rooted in solidarity. Against the all-encompassing darkness of uniformity, they keep alive the essential link that joins Bhagat Singh and Ho Chi Minh, Kolkata and Gaza, miners' strikes and freedom flotillas.

Globally, the left faces its crisis. Decades of neoliberal restructuring, the fragmentation of labour, and the rise of identity-based politics have weakened organised class power. Yet Gaza's tragedy has catalysed something new: the re-emergence of a moral, class-based internationalism. Dockworkers refusing arms shipments, health workers denouncing hospital bombings, and artists boycotting cultural exchanges show how solidarity can once again take material form.

For the Indian Left, this moment

demands reconnecting the struggles at home with global ones. The farmers resisting corporate land grabs in Chhattisgarh, the Adivasis opposing mining in Odisha, the workers organising in industrial corridors, and the minorities confronting majoritarian violence—all inhabit the same dialectic of power and resistance as the people of Gaza. To stand with Palestine is not to show charity; it is to recognise the shared logic of dispossession that defines the present age.

Internationalism, far from being a nostalgic slogan, emerges again as the only realistic politics in a world organised around capital and coercion.

What Gaza exposes is not only the brutality of occupation but also the exhaustion of the global order that sustains it. Imperialism today operates less through colonies and more through walls, blockades, sanctions, and debt. Against the mounting attack of this apparatus of fragmentation, only internationalism can provide a coherent alternative.

The flotilla, in this sense, is a metaphor for the politics the left must rediscover; people ought to take collective risk for collective emancipation. It demonstrates that solidarity is a weapon more enduring than drones and checkpoints. By uniting the struggles of workers, students, peasants, and the displaced across borders, the left can again articulate a global project of liberation.

The Gaza blockade will end one day—just as all blockades eventually do. The question history will ask is: who stood firm when the seas ran rough? The call is now for greater mobilisation, deeper solidarity, and renewed working-class internationalism.

To stand with Gaza is to stand for the right of all peoples to breathe free, to resist the empire, and to reclaim the world from the logic of siege. The moral geography of humanity today begins, once more, on the shores of Gaza. □□□

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INDIA DECLINING

Of Chaos and Power

Swapnanil Mukherjee

THE INDIAN ECONOMY IS experiencing a downward trend in every aspect of the development index. It stands 134 out of 193 countries in the Human Development Index 2024, 105 out of 127 countries in the Global Hunger Index 2024, 116 out of 163 countries in the Global Peace Index 2024, 42 out of 55 economies in the International Intellectual Property Index 2024, and 108 out of 193 countries in the Gender Inequality Index 2022. There are many more indices where India is performing too poorly to sustain. However, India's mainstream media focuses elsewhere; the discussion often diverts the masses from these alarming issues.

In India, power operates extraordinarily. It constantly dances in a spiral motion, making everything blurry and uncertain, and creating a sense of suspicion. If one tries to analyse it closely, it does not look like mere incompetence but a well-choreographed action.

It is claimed that demonetisation can wash out the problem of black money, terrorism and other unlawful activities. Still, the Reserve Bank of India shows that 99.3% of money is returned to the banking system. Therefore, the claim of eradicating black money is rendered null and void. However, it negatively affects the economy; at least 82 people have died while standing in a long line, people were being screwed, and small businesses are affected so adversely that they cannot even recover. Regarding the GST, it also breaks every promise it makes. Instead of ease of doing business, it creates enormous pressure on the MSME and informal sectors. It has been changed 697 times since its introduction. The bottom 50% of the population bears 64% of the

GST revenue share, while the top 10% share only 3.9%. This list can go on for a long time, but its regressive effects on society do not end. These are the economic Chaos that is being run in society. There are other types of Chaos, such as religious Chaos, Chaos in the division of language, and Chaos in the name of culture.

Recently, a new type of Chaos has emerged on the streets of India, centred on language. Once, the diverse languages of India were a source of pride; now, they have become a point of hatred. This shift is not organic; it is being imposed through the media and other pillars of the state. It is unprecedented for a constitutional body to polarise people against a language, yet this is happening now. For instance, the Delhi police allegedly referred to Bengali, one of the official languages of India, as a "Bangladeshi language."

Historically, language has been a medium of conflict in India; however, this current approach—where a constitutional authority publicly speaks out against a language—marks a new and alarming trend. It is becoming increasingly clear that the state is deliberately trying to maintain its political grip on society by instigating divisions. When language fails to create sufficient division, religion takes centre stage. The Ram Mandir movement was not simply about faith; it was a strategic distraction. It shifted public focus from unemployment and inflation to a temple, showing people that reclaiming a mythic past was more urgent than securing a stable future. In this belief, the state found its cover.

When religion and language both fail to make proper Chaos, hyper nationalism comes in. Before the Pulwama attack, there were 11 sepa-

rate intelligence inputs between January 2 and February 13, 2019 that warned of a possible attack on the convoy. However, it still happened, and it took place one week before the election. Rulers kept their power in the name of soldiers at that time. They have not taken any responsibility but have made some attacks on Pakistan. The Mainstream media showed it as a great victory.

Chaos makes things very uncertain, and people cannot have any expectations in this Chaos. Rights become a myth here; meanwhile, starvation, joblessness, rising inequality and other miseries of people are buried under the flags and slogans. This Chaos indicates that the state prefers a climate of uncertainty and fear, which spreads mistrust among the population. In an environment of uncertainty, people are less likely to think critically and more inclined to focus solely on survival; this is precisely what those in power want.

The present state power does not just want to rule; it tries to make its rule eternal. To do this, they have to have the validation of intellectuals and decent people. They know that they would not find it in a straight way, so they make this environment. The state understands that people's beliefs are more precious than their lives—people will go to great lengths to uphold them. The state knows that belief often outweighs logic. Therefore, it crafts false narratives, prioritising temples over food, language over livelihood, and nationalism over justice. These tales become so deeply ingrained that questioning them feels like an act of betrayal. People who really want some positive change are considered anti-national, Rapists, smugglers, fake 'Babas' become heroes in this chaotic system. But some people are still there to fight against this chaos, who always try to remind people that 'unite we stand, divide we fall', who gave their lives to spread the light of hope, a hope to live for. □□□

THROUGH THE WINDOW OF GANDHI

Medicine, Body and Public Health

Jayanta Bhattacharya

GANDHIAN THOUGHTS on politics have been widely discussed, but Gandhi's perception of modern medicine, human body, and health (especially public health) also remain quite fascinating till date.

In his *An Autobiography Or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Gandhi informs his readers—"The time of which I am now speaking is my sixteenth year. My father, as we have seen, was bed-ridden, suffering from a fistula. My mother, an old servant of the house, and I were his principal attendants. I had the duties of a nurse ... Every night I massaged his legs and retired only when he asked me to do so or after he had fallen asleep. I loved to do this service."

That he was a good nurse is evident from the fact that his first child was home-delivered by himself. He learned nursing while he was attached with the South African Army during the Boer War—"I found time to serve in the small hospital ... It consisted in ascertaining the patients' complaints, laying the facts before the doctor and dispensing the prescriptions. It brought me in close touch with suffering Indians, most of them indentured Tamil, Telugu or North India men. The experience stood me in good stead ... I offered my services for nursing the sick and wounded soldiers ... I had two sons born in South Africa, and my service in the hospital was useful in solving the question of their upbringing. (*Collected Works*, henceforth CW)

To remember, during the Boer War (1899–1902), Mahatma Gandhi organised and led the Indian Ambu-

lance Corps, a non-military volunteer group of about 1,100 men, to support the British. Gandhi believed that by aiding the British in this conflict, he could demonstrate the loyalty of Indians and thus earn them better treatment and civil rights within the British Empire, particularly in South Africa.

In his later writings, this notion of "home remedy" took up a good amount of attention. When all efforts of ayurvedic, hakims and folk treatment failed, modern surgery was suggested for his father. But he declined. Gandhi later thought—"if the physician had allowed the operation, the wound would have been easily healed ... But God had willed otherwise." (Ibid)

These trails of incidents had a lasting impression on framing his thoughts around body, health and medicine. The role of cleanliness on one hand, and excellence of modern surgery in comparison to traditional practices on the other, deeply influenced him.

"Such cleanliness is quite essential no doubt, but Western medical science had taught us that all the functions, including a bath, can be done in bed with the strictest regard to cleanliness, and without the slightest discomfort to the patient, the bed always remaining spotlessly clean. I should regard such cleanliness as quite consistent with Vaishnavism." (Ibid).

Interestingly, the heading of this chapter is "My Father's Death and My Double Shame". Why such a curious title? Let us know from Gandhi himself. "This was also the time when my wife was expecting a baby, circumstance which, as I can

see today, meant a double shame for me. For one thing, I did not restrain myself, as I should have done, whilst I was yet a student. And secondly, this carnal lust got the better of what I regarded as my duty to my parents, Shravana having been my ideal since childhood. Every night whilst my hands were busy massaging my father's legs, my mind was hovering about the bedroom, and that too at a time when religion, medical science and commonsense alike forbade sexual intercourse." The incident of "double shame" has significantly contributed to his notion of *brahmacharya* and husband-wife relationship.

Abstinence, self-piety, and ahimsa are some of the most important contributors to his notion around medicine and public health. Since 1888 when he reached London to become a barrister, a major part of his thought was preoccupied with some of his own novel ideas about the body and vegetarian food.

He derived these ideas from Ruskin's idealism (*Unto the Last*), inspired in part by Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism and Robert Owen's utopianism, "overwhelmed" by Tolstoy's *The Kingdom is Within You*. (For detailed study see, Stanley Wolpert, *Gandhi's Passion: The Life and Legacy of Mahatma Gandhi*).

Later in his life, he was influenced by two books on nature cure—Louis Kuhne's *The New Science of Healing or the Doctrine of Oneness of All Diseases* and Neo-Naturopathy: *The New Science of Healing or the Doctrine of Unity of Diseases*, and, also, from Adolf Just's *Return to Nature! Paradise Regained*.

Following these books, Gandhi insisted on (1) hydrotherapy or water-cure, (2) phytotherapy (treatment by plants), (3) mud poultice (treatment by soil and mud), (4) self-regulation, and (5) maintaining bal-

ance in diet, lifestyle and existence.

Gandhi shaped his view of public health based on the anti-modern medicine position and relied considerably on “home remedies” and “self-restraint” of an individual.

In his much talked about book *Hind Swaraj*, he says “I was at one time a great lover of the medical profession. It was my intention to become a doctor for the sake of the country. I now understand why the medicine men (the vaidyas) among us have not occupied a very honourable status. The English have certainly and effectively used the medical profession for holding us. English physicians are known to have used the profession with several Asiatic potentates for political gain.”

Further, “Doctors have almost unhinged us. Sometimes I think that quacks are better than highly qualified doctors. Let us consider: the business of a doctor is to take care of the body, or, properly speaking, not even that ... How do these diseases arise? Surely by our negligence or indulgence. I over-eat, I have indigestion, I go to a doctor, he gives me medicine, I am cured, I over-eat again, and I take his pills again. Had I not taken the pills in the first instance, I would have suffered the punishment deserved by me, and I would not have over-eaten again. The doctor intervened and helped me to indulge myself. My body thereby certainly felt more at ease, but my mind became weakened. A continuance of a course of medicine must, therefore, result in loss of control over the mind ... European doctors are the worst of all. For the sake of a mistaken care of the human body, they kill annually thousands of animals. They practise vivisection. No religion sanctions this. All say that it is not

necessary to take so many lives for the sake of our bodies.”

One more interesting aspect is the difference between Gandhi's idea of the origin of smallpox and that of modern medicine. Smallpox was a lethal disease until the 1960s. To kill the smallpox virus (which was later discovered) Jennerian vaccination was introduced in 1796 and practised throughout the world since the beginning of the 19th century. On the contrary, popular perception about the disease was confined to one's fault, sin or misconduct which would lead to the disease.

Gandhi seems to represent popular, anti-medicine voice regarding this disease. “We are all afraid of the small-pox, and have very crude notions about it ... In fact it is caused, just like other diseases, by the blood getting impure owing to some disorder of the bowels; and the poison that accumulates in the system is expelled in the form of small-pox. If this view is correct, then there is absolutely no need to be afraid of small-pox. If it were really a contagious disease, everyone should catch it by merely touching the patient; but this is not always the case. Hence, there is really no harm in touching the patient, provided we take some essential precautions in doing so.” (*A Guide to Health*)

It is incredible that the most-revered national leader and a trained barrister can further say—“Vaccination seems to be a savage custom. It is one of the poisonous superstitions of our times the equal of which is not to be found among so-called primitive societies ... Vaccination is a filthy remedy ... I personally feel that in taking this vaccine we are guilty of sacrilege.” (CW)

Here the question of divine causation of any disease supervenes over disease-causation out of anatomical, physiological or biochemical changes. To put it summarily, he

accused doctors—“it is only the self-interest of doctors that stands in the way of the abolition of this inhuman practice, for the fear of losing the large incomes that they at present derive from this source blinds them to the countless evils which it brings.” (*A Guide to Health*)

Gandhi's vehement opposition to modern medicine is based on—(1) vivisection or dissection, (2) more dependence on medicine leading to iatrogenic diseases, (3) the use of advertisements in medicine, especially patent medicine, and (4) the tidal increase of hospitals. He categorically stated—“I believe that a multiplicity of hospitals is no test of civilization. It is rather a symptom of decay, even as the multiplicity of *pinjrapoles*.” (CW)

Alternatively, he stressed on sanitation and hygiene—“The science of sanitation is infinitely more ennobling though more difficult of execution, than the science of healing... The present science of medicine is divorced from religion ... A clean spirit must build a clean body... Vivisection, in my opinion, is the blackest of all blackest crimes that man is at present committing against God and his fair creation.” (Ibid)

Rudolph Virchow, the German pathologist and harbinger of social medicine, once commented: “Medicine is a social science, and politics nothing but medicine at a larger scale.” Virchow linked medicine with politics and political programs. It is very true for Gandhi too. His political and personal belief guided and shaped his notion about medicine and (public) health. His notion about nature cure and personal hygiene and religious adherence leads to a seamless state where modern public health (contrasted with the historic Alma-Ata Declaration, 1978) can never be achieved—whatever pious wishes it may contain or he may have. □□□

LETTERS

80 Years Later

An estimated 35 million Chinese soldiers and civilians died as part of their country's sacrifice as a key Allied power, yet 80 years later China finds itself not only a forgotten ally but also recast as an adversary. When President Xi Jinping takes to the rostrum overlooking Tiananmen Square for next week's military parade marking the 80th anniversary of victory in the Sino-Japanese war and World War II's global defeat of fascism, China's sacrifices will be remembered. Xi recalled that "80 years ago, the forces of justice worldwide, including *China and the Soviet Union*, fought heroically side by side, united in their resolve, and defeated the seemingly invincible fascist powers. Today, 80 years later, unilateralism, hegemony, and domineering bullying are causing profound harm. Humanity once again stands at a crossroads: unity or division, dialogue or confrontation, win-win cooperation or zero-sum rivalry"

A Reader

Costs of War Project

Israel would not have been able to sustain its wars across the Middle East, including the genocide in Gaza, without Washington's financial support, which has exceeded \$21 billion since October 2023, according to new reports.

The reports, released by the Costs of War Project at Brown University on October 7, found that without constant US weapons and money, Israel wouldn't have been able to sustain its genocidal war on Gaza, start a war with Iran, or repeatedly bomb Yemen.

"Given the scale of current and future spending, it is clear the [Israeli army] could not have done the damage they have done in Gaza or esca-

lated their military activities throughout the region without US financing, weapons, and political support," read the report, *US Military Aid and Arms Transfers to Israel*, October 2023–September 2025, by William D Hartung, a senior research fellow at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft.

They show how US support for Israel has helped it continue to wage war on multiple fronts for two years, and analysts backed up the reports' conclusions.

The US has long been Israel's most fervent backer. When it comes to US foreign aid, Israel is the largest annual recipient (at around \$3.3bn yearly) and the largest cumulative one (more than \$150bn until 2022).

**Quds News Network
Decline of Union Power**

Over the past four decades, neoliberal economics and globalisation have systematically dismantled the security once afforded to the working class through its own efforts. Through the privatisation of public services, the off-shoring of manufacturing, and the outsourcing of what remained, wealth has been funnelled upwards, leaving behind hollowed-out communities reliant on failing public infrastructure and insecure, low-paid work.

An unholy trinity has arisen from this economic experiment: skyrocketing corporate profits, the lowest investment levels among G7 nations, and a profound collapse in living standards. Since 1988, 44 percent of all wealth growth in the UK has been captured by the wealthiest 1 percent, while the country's public infrastructure now faces a £200 billion investment shortfall. One-third of public spending is outsourced to private firms and half of the welfare budget goes to in-work benefits—a direct subsidy

to employers who pay wages too low to live on.

This economic transformation was not accidental; it was accompanied by the systematic dismantling of working-class power and institutions. As industries closed and jobs disappeared, so too did the trade unions that were based in those communities. Collective bargaining coverage has collapsed from 80 percent to just 25 percent, while union membership has fallen from 38 percent in 1979 to just over 10 percent today. Over 3.6 million UK workers are trapped in insecure employment (of these, a disproportionate number are women in care and service roles who earn below-average wages).

The labour movement must reconnect with its class roots and reassert the politics of solidarity.

If workers fail to revive the labour movement, they risk watching it drift into total irrelevance, making it no longer a force in working-class life but a memory of what once was. The time for renewal is now.

**Eddie Dempsey, London
Zubeen was for All**

Amid soaring Hindu-Muslim tensions in the BJP-ruled north-eastern state of Assam, Zubeen Garg's music served as a rare unifier. In Garg's music, the idea of an Assam for Hindus and Muslims, Assamese speakers and Bengali speakers alike, was not an illusion.

Zubeen's songs didn't merely entertain, they also addressed the depths of what it means to be human, to love, to suffer and to find meaning in an often absurd world.

Garg's song, *Pakhi Pakhi Ei Mon* (My heart is like a feather) explored themes of freedom and captivity.

Dilip Simeon

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Subhas got arrested for his political activities. After coming out from jail he, Sanjay and others organised APDR [Association for the Protection of Democratic Rights]. He translated Romila Thapar's book on Ancient Indian History into Bengali. —T Vijayendra

'I am very sorry to hear that he has passed away. I do indeed remember him and our exchanges in the course of his translating my book. Please convey my condolences and sincerest sympathies to his family'

—Romila Thapar

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