

# frontier

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## *A 30,000-Page Chargesheet*

**V**ETERAN JOURNALIST AND RENOWNED HUMAN RIGHTS activist Gautam Navlakha has been in jail since April 14, 2020. The legal experts think there is no valid ground to keep him in custody because the probe into the case has already been completed. But this biggest showpiece of 'democracy' hardly bothers about legal niceties. The government violates its own law with impunity. Anybody can be arrested anywhere anytime under the spacious pretext of Naxalite resurgence. A special National Investigation Agency (NIA) court very recently rejected his bail plea. Navlakha, an accused in Elgar-Parishad-Maoist links case was arrested on August 18, 2018. In his bail petition he cited his poor health condition as he suffers from a number of ailments--what is agonising is a lump has been detected in his chest. Initially he was kept under house arrest but this reprieve was short-lived. He was later sent to judicial custody and lodged at the Taloja prison near Navi Mumbai.

NIA which is probing the case opposed Navlakha's bail plea and described him as an active member of the outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoist). But this Maoist connection allegation is concocted and fabricated. He was never a member of any communist party, Maoist or otherwise.

The case relates to alleged inflammatory speeches delivered at the Elgar Parishad 'conclave, held at Shaniwarwada in Pune on December 31, 2017, which police claimed triggered violence the next day near the Bhima-Koregaon war memorial . This memorial is a symbol of upper-caste humiliation. The Pune police that probed the incident initially made a case out of maoist connection without showing any evidence. The NIA later entered the scene and took up the case in which 15 persons were framed as accused under the notorious Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and the Indian penal code.

The NIA charge-sheet has failed to connect Navlakha with a larger conspiracy against the state and yet he is in jail. This human rights activist seems to be a security threat to the government. They see the spectre of Maoism in every voice of dissent.

For one thing Navlakha has criticised the Maoists and is implacably opposed to Naxal violence but the hon'ble court is not interested in Navlakha's published writings which are pre-date his arrest. There was no material in the charge-sheet to prove Navlakha has anywhere, by words

either spoken or written or by any visible representation attempted to bring hatred, disaffection against the government and stoke violence. But the special court declined to attach any importance to this aspect of Navlakha's defence.

The trial once starts is going to take a long time to complete as there are 15 accused persons, including Vara Vara Rao who is now on bail, and the charge-sheet is a 30,000- page document with over 150 witnesses. As per NIA observation Navlakha inculcated maoist sympathies among students and others. So he can be put behind bars for an

indefinite period! But the very charge is baseless; it has no taker other than the ruling party bigwigs.

Unless human rights bodies across the country get united and launch movement against this illegal detention, Navlakha may remain in jail for the rest of his life though he needs special medical attention immediately. His life is in danger. Another December is approaching to revisit the Bhima-Koregaon episode and it is an opportune moment to raise voices against the conspiracy hatched by the powers that be, to silence the oppressed.

If anything Maoists no longer hit

the headlines as they used to do even a few years back. The government has succeeded to isolate them in more ways than one. And yet the persons in charge of state intelligence are working overtime to demonise people's movements by bracketing them with naxalites. Massive unemployment is generating spontaneous mass outburst here and there and the government is conveniently using maoist stick to suppress people's anger. Human rights defenders are the worst victims of state repression because they are the voice of the voiceless.

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## COMMENT

### Headed for a Doom

THE OFT UTTERED REFRAIN 'Climate change and its Consequences' have manifested in the recent years with increased number of forest fires, depleting non-renewable source of energy, massive floods killing thousands at a time.

Global warming is a hard reality. Everybody talks about it but nobody is serious about it. Advanced industrialised countries maintain a double standard when it is the question of reducing green house gases. They ask less developed countries not to burn coal but they themselves show no inclination to limit emissions. With Russia stopping gas supply to Europe in view of the Ukraine war and sanctions on Moscow coal is now the only option for Germany and some east European countries to tide over the mounting energy crisis. Germany is re-starting its coal-fired thermal plants giving goodbye to their much publicised plan that they would phase out coal-based plants by 2050. And Poland has stepped up its coal production. In short global warming is likely to worsen not in the distant future.

The snow and ice on Himalayas and its Glaciers are melting which has caused floods in Pakistan and droughts in China. And it is going to affect India severely in the coming years.

The continuous melting of ice and snow in the Himalayas has led to 30 million people being affected in Pakistan, submerging not just farmlands but also cities. When the earth heats up, more water evaporates and is captured in the atmosphere, creating drought and, when it finally rains, a torrent. The period from January to July 2022 was the sixth-warmest start to a calendar year for the globe in records going back 143 years, according to the US National Centers for Environmental Information.

The glacial melt in Himalayas is way more than scientists had anticipated. The record heat wave planet Earth witnessed this year has resulted in the increased glacial melt on the Alps for Europe and Himalayas for the Asian countries

Himalayas are also the largest reserve of frozen fresh water after

North and South poles. Global warming is accelerating the loss of Himalayan glaciers, destabilising a fragile system that's helped regulate the earth's atmosphere and key water cycles for millennia.

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Indore have recorded extreme melting in the Himalayan glaciers due to intense summer and heat waves earlier this year. They have been tracking the extent of snow cover, ice formations, and discharge from seasonal snowmelt for over 15 years.

India witnessed an intense heat wave in early summer when temperatures in March and April broke 100-year records. And it caused glacial melt. A team of IIT Indore was on a glacier recently and they saw record-breaking melt in the Himalayas.

Glaciers are made of layers of compressed snow that move or "flow" due to gravity and the softness of ice relative to rock. A glacier's "tongue" can extend hundreds of miles from its high-altitude origins, and the end, or "snout" can advance or retreat based on snow accumulating or melting.

Researchers last year also estimated that the glaciers have lost

around 40 per cent of their area, shrinking from a peak of 28,000 square kms to around 19,600 sq kms in 2021. During that period they also lost 390 cubic kms of ice.

The Himalayas, Karakoram, and Hindu Kush mountain ranges contain almost 55,000 glaciers that feed river systems on which more than 1.3 billion people rely. India has 16,627 glaciers which have also started melting at an alarming rate.

If 7000 glaciers could rein catastrophe on Pakistan, India could be headed for a doom.

Russia and four other European countries are actively intervening in the Arctic region to establish military bases and exploring units to search for minerals and oil. And Arctic ice is melting. Climate crisis is knocking at the door but after some noises on climate problem it is business as usual. □□□

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#### NOTE

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## All this Nuclear Madness

*Bharat Dogra writes:*

**T**HE UNION OF CONCERNED Scientists (UCS), USA, has written recently that warheads on just one US nuclear armed submarine have SEVEN times the destructive power of ALL the bombs dropped during World War II including the two atomic bombs dropped on Japan. The USA has tens of such submarines at sea.

People are familiar with and frightened by the enormous destruction caused by the atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. So it is shocking to know that the most powerful weapon available now—B83 gravity bomb—is more than 80 times destructive than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

The steady deterioration in the relations of the USA and Russia are well-known. Hence it is of great concern to know that over 90 per cent of the nuclear weapons of the world are concentrated in the hands of these two countries alone. Nuclear weapons modernisation programme of both these countries is expanding.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI, Report for 2022), the total number of nuclear weapons of the USA is 5428. The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) puts this

number at around 5500, 1389 of which are deployed and ready to be delivered. These weapons are kept in submarines and 80 feet deep missile silos across five of the Great Plains states. Others are stored at Air Force bases where these can be loaded on long-range bombers.

What is more, nearly 150 of the US nuclear bombs are deployed at airbases in five European countries. Which are these five countries? Some reviews of weapons situation mention these to be Germany, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands and Turkey.

According to the UCS, nearly half of the deployed weapons in the USA (or a total of about 700 weapons) are maintained on 'hair-trigger alert', able to be launched very quickly after a presidential order. These include almost all of the entire silo based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and a comparable number of warheads on submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs). ICBMs can be launched within a couple minutes and SLBMs within 15 minutes.

According to SIPRI Russia has somewhat higher number of nuclear weapons estimated at 5977. UCS puts this number at 6300, 1458 of which are deployed.

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Both sources say that China has 350 nuclear weapons. According to the UCS, just over 100 of these are aligned to missiles that can reach the USA. China is known to be expanding and modernising its nuclear weapons.

Keeping in view the long-term hostile relations between India and Pakistan it is a matter of concern that both these countries too are expanding and modernising their nuclear weapons. According to UCS India has 150 nuclear weapons, while SIPRI puts this number at 160 weapons. In the case of Pakistan, the number of nuclear weapons has been estimated by UCS at 150 and by SIPRI at 165.

France has 290 to 300 nuclear weapons, most of which are based on submarines. According to SIPRI the number of nuclear weapons possessed by the UK are 225.

The Middle East being a very volatile region which has seen several wars and conflicts, the nuclear weap-

ons of Israel have been a source of much concern. Although Israel has never openly declared its possession of nuclear weapons, it is believed to have a stock of around 100 nuclear weapons, according to UCS (90, according to SIPRI). North Korea may have up to 20 nuclear weapons.

In a special report on future wars, the Economist has stated, "Existing nuclear arms control agreements are fraying. The protocols and understandings that helped avert Armageddon during the cold war have not been renewed".

The Economist report states that

the USA has been working on a concept known as Conventional Prompt Global Strike (CPGS) for over a decade. "The idea is to deliver a conventional warhead with a very high degree of accuracy, at hypersonic speeds (at least five times faster than the speed of sound), through even the most densely defended space... Russia and China claim that CPGS could be highly destabilising if used in conjunction with advanced missile defenses. Meanwhile they are developing similar weapons of their own."

Further this report says that the

command-and-control systems of nuclear weapons are becoming vulnerable to hacking by new cyber-weapons or 'blinding' of the satellites they depend on. A country under such an attack could find itself under pressure to choose between losing control of its nuclear weapons and using them.

Hence it is clear that the threat from nuclear weapons has been increasing due to multiple factors and it is high time that the phasing out and elimination of nuclear weapons should be placed at the top of the future agenda of humanity. □□□

#### ALL THAT GLITTERS...

## The Kerala Model—A Critique

*T G Jacob*

**T**HE ENIGMA OF KERALA IS created as well as historically sanctioned. The formation of the present administrative unit on the basis of Malayalam language in 1956 was immediately followed by an interesting episode, namely, the coming to political power of the Communist Party of India through a peaceful constitutionally provided democratic election process based on adult franchise. This party had existed and led struggles of the sub-alterns for quite some time and after the withdrawal of the Telangana armed struggle in 1951 had unconditionally embraced constitutionalism, surrendered all arms, and entered mainstream parliamentary politics. It was not only in Kerala that they won the assembly elections; they made an impressive show in Andhra Pradesh too. The transformation of the CP was symbolised by abandonment of the programme of a revolutionary overthrow of the status quo and the installation of a reformist economic programme in its place. This stream had always been very strong in the party, espe-

cially among the central leadership. This formal changeover followed the shift in the class nature of the state post-1947.

By no means did the Communist Party led State government in Kerala attempt any major radical measures undermining the given socio-economic structure; it only tried to implement certain reforms advocated and promised by the Indian National Congress, the ruling party of the country as a whole. But even this little was a bit too much for the entrenched dominant interests and they staged a 'liberation' struggle and ousted the State government. This ousting of the democratically elected government failed to generate rethinking about the nature of the politico-economic system and the strategy of working within it. On and off the Constitutional communists, also called Official communists, have been coming to power in Kerala and over a period of several decades they themselves have become an established socio-economic power to be reckoned with in the State.

The Social Democrats initiated

several welfare measures and coined the phrase "Kerala model of development". Politically, it amounted to self-praise. The gist of this model propagated for emulation by others was that it is possible to achieve higher levels of development and even progress, if there is a political will to bypass the linear model of development of productive forces. Distributive equity/progressive policies can bring about a higher quality of life without the usually required growth of productive forces. What exactly there is to be distributed and among whom was not seriously thought about.

Higher quality of life was identified and achieved with higher life expectancy, lower infant mortality, universal literacy and general education, better communication facilities, near total electrification, near total primary health coverage, and so on. However, soon after propounding this 'model' unsavoury characteristics like large per capita debt and the phenomenon of accumulating new debts to service old debt, which shows bankruptcy, came out in the open.

Earlier it was often said that Kerala remains backward in terms of growth of industrial capitalism because the workers are not disci-

plined and are prone to disrupt production. This behaviour was awarded to the influence of communist ideas, which dissuades prospective investors from investing. Now scarcity of labour is given as a reason for lack of investment. This scarcity is due to the phenomenon of large-scale out-migration of skilled, semi-skilled, and manual workers to the Arabian Gulf countries attracted by relatively higher wages. Now this out-migration has reached its limits. This migration of hundreds of thousands of productive youth has given rise to a large flow of overseas remittances which injects economic buoyancy mainly of the variety of enhanced consumption both durable and transient. Land has assumed rising monetary/speculative value due to the construction boom largely accounted for by remittances. This has also meant decreasing productive use value of land. Conversion of wet land to dry land has gained momentum contributing to a drastic reduction in food production and increasingly chronic dependency for basic food needs on outside regions. Labour for the burgeoning construction sector mainly comes from outside the State and is paid well. It is interesting to note that just as the Malayalee worker went to the Gulf for higher wages now workers from Eastern India are coming to Kerala for the same reason. A skilled Malayalee carpenter or mason can now earn more by instructing and managing the migrant youth than by working for wages. They cannot be viewed as workers in the real sense of the term, rather they are now petty bourgeois overseers exploiting the migrant workers and living a middle class life through surplus extraction from the actual workers.

This tendency already existed earlier. The astounding phenomenon of "nokku kooly", i.e., wages for simply looking on, had already be-

come standard practice among the unionised head-load workers. They are not supervisors or overseers but only lookers-on assured of money for work they are not doing.

It is also noted that for any small-scale construction work like that of a single house at least 60% of the total cost is accounted for by direct wages. This is inordinately high on all accounts. Along with this distortion add the callous irresponsibility rampant among the Malayalee 'workers,' which invariably pushes up the cost further. This irresponsibility is perhaps a by-product of basic scarcity of labour power. But it can equally be the result of an anti-work parasitic culture nurtured by the possibilities of easy living, its attendant psychology and all-pervading consumer culture. It has nothing to do with class consciousness or class struggle, though simple-minded social democrats may say that it is all class assertion and class power. Anti-work culture and parasitism is certainly not a characteristic of a producing working class, it is the characteristic of those who live by the labour of others. In this context it is worthwhile to note that on an all-India level the bulk of wealth production is done by the unorganised labour force, and even in modern large-scale industries like metallurgy, ad-hoc conditions of labour employment is the dominant trend since quite some time and the organised, unionised workers, who enjoy security of employment, higher wages and a number of perks are often a small minority in such industries. This trend has percolated into the education 'industry' also. The worker aristocrats are often the worst enemies of the insecure casual workers when they try to raise any demands for the improvement of living and working conditions.

The basic argument is that labour and labour processes existing here

are to be redefined as they are incompatible with the prevalent conceptualisations of working class and its social and political role.

Production of essential food is grossly deficient in Kerala. Rice, the staple diet, is mostly imported from other States; so are vegetables and meat. Of late, even fish has started to come from Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. This has many serious implications for the people as a whole irrespective of classes. Food security/insecurity is not only an economic variable but also a highly potent political one especially in an overall system where even the watered-down federalism that is in place is on the waning side with centralisation of economic and political power in the ascendancy.

The most visible change that has happened in Kerala agriculture during the last half century is the drastic reduction of acreage under food crops, especially that under paddy. The most often heard reason for this reduction is the shortage and high cost of labour power; and paddy cultivation is a labour intensive affair. Farmers who shift to other crops

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or let the fields lie fallow often talk about paddy cultivation as an economic loss. This is certainly not in any absolute sense of loss and profit, the term “loss” here is only in a relative sense. Even that is doubtful. The fact is that a good number of agriculturists are only nominal agriculturists. They may own paddy land but professionally they are not agriculturists. They would prefer to lease out the fields or alternately allow them to lie fallow. They may also allow the land to be destroyed entirely by leasing it out for brick kilns. It is a common sight to see uncultivated paddy fields. It is even more common to see paddy fields converted to cash crop land. These cash crops are generally ginger and bananas, both exclusively for the market. In other words, speculation enters the scene.

Another trend in land utilisation pattern is the conversion of wet to dry land, a direct result of the increased availability of disposable money, a contributory factor of which is the increased flow of remittances from abroad.

The wet lands became the casualty to this greed for dry land. To

make them dry they have to be raised, which needs soil. The conversion process, therefore, necessarily leads to geographical distortions in some other lands. On the one side, wet lands cease to be water storages, and on the other, hillocks become flat. In fact, buying soil becomes a significant item in the cost of construction of a house. Moreover, construction needs an enormous amount of rock mining which becomes seriously debilitating to the stability of the whole place. Thus one sees that the multiplier effect becomes all-encompassing with sure-fire consequences for the structural stability of the land itself with the result that disaster management has emerged as the newest industry.

The built-up space in the State is estimated to be more than what is required and the amount of built-up space lying vacant is also significant. This means that the investment that went into it is dead.

Many of the cash crops currently grown in the State were found in the wild and the collection was being done by the peasants or Adivasis. Linked to the ports through a chain of intermediaries using the inland waterways they were exported by Arab, Syrian, and Jewish traders concentrated in the then sea ports on the Arabian Sea coast. The local chieftains derived incomes through taxes on this export. The British introduced organised plantations after clearing forests and also established big plantations of tea and coffee, the growing of which soon percolated to local small growers too. While tea remained confined to big plantations in Kerala, coffee became a predominantly small grower crop. The list of cash crops grown in Kerala is quite large and it keeps on growing, vanilla and cocoa being the latest additions. A few herbs are also grown commercially now, a direct result of large-scale commercialisation of Ayurveda

partly triggered by the growth of medical tourism.

The market/money value of cash crop products constantly fluctuates. These money values are determined by a variety of factors among which export-import policies play a crucial role. The cost of production which includes cost of labour power, energy, and chemical inputs are ever on the increasing scale. This creates a basic disequilibrium between costs and returns and hence vitally affects the economic well-being of the growers. The same is the case for food crops grown for the market.

As such the slot of Kerala in the general scheme of the geographical division of labour is as primary producer and as producer of labour power. The tragedy is that labour power is mainly exported on an all-India and global level, and primary production has grown at the expense of basic self-sufficiency while simultaneously functioning as a conduit for super-profit making by corporate businesses.

There is growing thinking in Kerala about the need for stable economic conditions. Ultimately this means breaking out of the present slot of labour power exporter and primary producer. Developing value-adding processes and finding local, all-India and global markets for the value-added products is the challenge.

Every cash crop grown in the State is suitable for value-added diverse products and the home market itself is big enough to begin with.

When one takes the availability of banking facilities it can be seen that Kerala rates number one in the entire country. It is a pioneer in cooperative banking apart from having the highest density of normal commercial banking establishments. Mainly due to the heavy inflow of remittances the amount of deposits is high but the same cannot be said about the amount of credit advanced by the

গড্ডালিকা প্রবাহ থেকে

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banks. In fact, for a long time the credit-deposit ratio was abysmally low and even now it has only marginally improved. When one looks at the all-India picture there are incredible differences between different regions of the country. It is high in the Gujarat-Maharashtra belt while in Kerala it is low, even though the State has a higher density of banking and per capita deposits. This means that the banking system is working as a very efficient conduit for suction of investible surplus from Kerala.

Kerala is well-recognised as a good foreign exchange earner. Overseas remittances, export of primary products like spices, earnings from international tourism industry are the main components of these foreign exchange earnings. Of course, these sources hike the money circulation in the place and increase income levels in rupee terms. But how and who expends these hard currency deposits does not come within the State's economic rights. The utilisation of dollar or any other hard currency deposits is decided at the Centre and the States have no effective voice in such decisions.

When thousands of primary producers killed themselves in the cash crops belt of Kerala due to being caught in a debt trap the farmers organised themselves to demand a debt moratorium. Mainly leading public sector banks were targeted. In Wayanad—the hub of the agitation—the concerned lead bank even threatened to wind up its operations in retaliation. Apparently the logic of the banks conforms to sound banking principles; it is that they are not responsible for un-remunerative prices of agricultural commodities, and credit is a commodity with its own costs on which the viability of the banking system itself is based. However, this logic, when it comes to actual practice becomes blatantly one-sided and discriminatory. Erst-

while profit-making public sector banks are now in doldrums not because of agricultural loans but corporate loans and even outright theft by corporates.

The products' market is another sordid story that is entirely out of the primary producers' control. The demands for "remunerative prices" or MSP become the rallying cry for the farmers' movements.

The dependency of the State for basic goods and services on outside areas and peoples is all prevalent.

One of the most visible after-effects of the consumption spree is the difficulty of disposing both inorganic and organic waste. When people look at popular struggles, often localised, it is found that they mostly relate to environmental issues and among them the maximum relate to unscientific waste disposal. Dumping waste from urban areas into the rural areas is commonly reported and several such struggles are long-drawn-out attracting the attention of the entire people. Reports of waste being transported in trucks to the neighbouring States of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu under cover of night and dumping it on the roadside in those States inviting hostile reactions is also common. Disposal of waste is quite a messy problem facing the whole State, especially the urban areas. There is simply no space and infrastructure to dispose the waste generated safely without creating environmental hazards.

Another visible aspect of consumption in the State is the medical industry. The health industry thrives in the State with a very large number of privately owned hospitals and allied health services in every nook and corner of the State. Hospitals are invariably multi-crore businesses with all kinds of necessary and unnecessary equipments, often imported, which dazzle the customers. Even before the doctor conducts a preliminary examination of the patient half a dozen tests

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are routinely ordered. Of course, the hospital gets a hefty commission from the laboratory, if it happens not to be part of the hospital. The hospital is constrained to make a minimum amount of money every month whether there are a sufficient number of patients or not. Unethical practices abound like insisting on surgery even when not really required, prescribing unnecessary medicines, or insisting on admitting the patient when it is least necessary.

The State grows fairly good quality coffee. A variety of finished products like instant coffee can be made that do not involve inaccessible technology or mega capital outlays. But the production of instant coffee is controlled by a couple of multinational companies out of which Nestle is the foremost.

Before the invasion by the hybrid seed agriculture technology Kerala had a large variety of indigenous varieties many of them being fragrant types like Jeerakashala and Gandhakashala grown in the lower Western Ghats region. Now the cultivation is less than in earlier days but these varieties are still cultivated. It is a local crop and the grains are used on special occasions like marriages. It is considered ideal for preparing the fabled Malabar Biriyani. From superlative front page advertisements in the prominent local newspapers for this rice, it is found that the product is owned and marketed by an agro corporation operating from beyond Kolkata, more than three thousand kms from where it is grown.

Every part of the coconut tree that abundantly grows in Kerala can be put to human use. Its oil is used for cooking purposes. The coir industry is based on the fibre extracted from its husk. Tender coconut water and fresh palm toddy (Nira) are wonderful health drinks. Toddy can be used for making value-

added products like jaggery. The mature tree yields hard wood and the leaves provide excellent roofing material. Little wonder that it is known as a wish fulfilment tree.

Toddy can be used to produce hard liquor as well. Liquor is a State subject, which perennially cash starved State governments find convenient to ruthlessly farm. It is a fairly inelastic commodity in relation to price changes; whatever the price, demand is more or less assured, and it is this characteristic that is exploited to the hilt. The contracts/licenses to operate the shops for a certain time are auctioned to the highest bidder. Kerala, a chronically debt-ridden State, depends on excise revenue from liquor even for the day-to-day working of the government. This has been the condition of State finances since many years with no alternative to this source of revenue. Under such conditions the liquor lobby enjoys growing economic and political power in the State.

The adulteration is so much that consumer taste itself has metamorphosed to the extent that if by chance a consumer is offered genuine toddy he may probably denounce it as adulterated.

Another story is that of the massive market manipulation in the 1980s to kill coconut oil as a cooking medium. The effort succeeded too at least in the short run in Kerala. Suddenly there was a spurt of literature in the popular print media about the dangerous character of coconut oil authored apparently by health and nutrition experts. The propaganda was concerted and alarmist that the use of coconut as an edible oil drastically increases the cholesterol content in the human body directly leading to serious health hazards involving the heart. People got scared and dropped their favourite cooking oil. Prices reached rock bottom. The stocks

were purchased by companies like Tata Oils, who use it mainly for manufacturing goods like soaps, shampoos, hair oil etc.

The hundreds of thousands of growers have learned to live with the 'uneconomic' tree. The research and promotional institutions set up at public cost do not have the motivation or the capability to solve the problems besetting the tree. They are there for the sake of employment and income for 'experts'.

Considerable stretches of the coast in southern Kerala are of black sand, which is the ore for monazite and limonite, two minerals of great strategic and commercial value in the global market. They are collected in large quantities, subjected to primary processing, and shipped to rich countries to be further processed and used in their electronics, armaments and/or nuclear industries. The natural radiation levels in the mining areas are high and this is greatly augmented by the mining and primary processing. Large numbers of inhabitants are plagued with wasting diseases for which there is no cure.

Of late, granite mining has become a sensitive topic in Kerala. Kerala has extensive granite formations beneath a not very thick but fertile top soil. For the past few decades this granite is being recklessly mined particularly in the hilly regions. It is a high profit business but the area of mining becomes totally useless once the mining is over.

The attitude to women shows no religious and community bias in Kerala. The upper caste Hindus both traditional and co-opted, the casteist Christians, and Muslims display a similar character when it comes to women. Casteism is also common to all of them. Only the Adivasis, and to a lesser extent the Dalits, are exempt from this reactionary approach. □□□

*[This is a shortened version of a longish piece.]*



## WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

## Remembering Gauri Lankesh

*Subhash Gatade*

**I**T IS NOW HISTORY HOW Gauri Lankesh was assassinated by rightwing Hindutva fanatics outside her home in Rajarajeshwari Nagar on 5 September 2017.

The killing shocked the people of Karnataka and everyone else who believed in a just and equitable society which is based on reason, rationality and scientific temper.

There are many aspects of Gauri Lankesh's life which are inspiring to everyone, the way she abandoned a bright career in English Journalism and opted to continue her father's glorious legacy by writing in Kannada, the way she did not limit herself to writing but also turned to activism, the way she adopted a very daring path of speaking truth to power without fearing for the consequences.

One is rather amazed by the tremendous energy she possessed that she persisted in the struggle against heavy odds, did not give up despite cases being filed against her in different courts of Karnataka for her work of defence of human rights and a consistent opposition to communal politics. A tactics much used by the rightwing forces to deter conscious people from challenging them and to keep them bogged down in cases after cases, in a judicial system where the prolonged process itself becomes a punishment.

In one such case of defamation lodged by a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader, the court had even convicted her and she was out on bail.

One of the remarkable intervention she did in public life pertained to her raising questions about the then Chief Justice of Karnataka's speech at Udupi Mutt—which he had visited at the invitation of Pejavara

Swamy, known as one of the founding members of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. The honourable justice supposedly had talked the language of Hindu Unity there to build a Ram temple.

'When the Eye of Justice is jaundiced', the title of her intervention itself displayed how she viewed the speech. Her contention was that judiciary in a democracy is 'expected to be independent of not just the legislative and the executive' but also 'be independent of social biases' and when a judge 'displays his/ her biases blatantly' s/he fails miserably.

It is for everyone to see that by her commitment to the cause and the way she evolved into an uncompromising fighter against rightwing extremism, she has touched lives of thousands of people which were evident in the tremendous outpouring of grief on the streets of Bengaluru when she was taken for cremation.

In truth people's anger over her killing in fact further propelled investigation into her murder and the conspiracy behind it hatched by the rightwing religious bigots who consider 'destruction of evil doers as spiritual practice'.

Looking back one just wished one had met her more and learnt from her wide experience in the social field as an activist and a journalist.

The planned killing of Gauri was the fourth such assassination of activists and scholars within a span of four years executed by the same rightwing formation.

The spree of killings of activists and scholars had its beginning in the year 2013 when Dr Naredra

Dabholkr, the legendary anti-superstition activist was killed while he had gone out for a morning walk in Pune which was followed by assassination of well-known Communist Leader Govind Pansare (Feb 2015) in Kolhapur. The third one who fell to their bullets was Prof M M Kalburgi, famous Kannada Scholar, known for his prolific writings (August 2015).

It is true that the killings were basically a message to everyone that the ideas these activists, scholars represented, the work they were doing, was an anathema to those people who wanted to usher India into a majoritarian Hindu Rashtra.

It was a message that whosoever is working to raise the consciousness of people, for propagation of values of reason, rationality, scientific temper and also preparing them to fight inequality, discrimination, obscurantism, mental slavery, sectarianism based on caste, creed, religion, even within the domain of Constitution, has basically no place in their vision of things.

Investigation into Gauri Lankesh's murder had also led to the discovery of the hit list prepared by these fanatics which included names of many leading writers, activists, social workers not only from Karnataka but also outside who had consistently opposed the exclusivist agenda to make religion a basis of nationhood in the 20th Century, who were opposed to turn a Secular Democracy like India, into a Hindu Rashtra.

The topmost name on the list was that of legendary actor, director and public intellectual Girish Karnad

Today, it is more common to criminalise or stigmatise someone who merely tweets her / his opposition to the powers that be and even send her / him to jail under draconian acts.

The state of affairs in the coun-

try can be gauged by the simple fact that in 2021 alone six journalists were killed in India and more than 100 were seriously injured by enemies of freedom of expression.

Ascendant Hindutva Supremacism in its first Avatar re-discovered the phenomenon of lynching—a relic of a bygone era in US society when Blacks were hounded by White Supremacists—when many innocents belonging to religious minorities—namely Muslims—and social minorities—namely Dalits and Adivasis were lynched merely for the suspicion of carrying beef or were badly wounded.

With its second coming at the centre, lynching has not only been normalised but today open calls for genocide of the 'others', the religious and social minorities, in so-called Dharm Sansads, have become more common, with the judiciary either turning a blind eye or not rising to the expectations of people seeking justice and enforcing implementation of rule of law according to Constitution.

In today's India the whole idea of justice is being turned on its head where bulldozer has emerged as the new dispenser of justice, where throwing all judicial procedures to the winds, police and administration are found to be engaged in literally bulldozing houses and shops of sections of people—who are already under assault of majoritarian storm troopers.

People who were convicted for gang rape of Bilkis Bano and her close relatives and murder of thirteen people and were punished for life imprisonment were released by the state of Gujarat prematurely by clearly violating the necessary procedures involved and with the central government turning a blind eye to this act, what irked people further was the way in which they were garlanded and even felicitated.

What people are witnessing to-

day is unprecedented in independent India's 75 years of tortuous journey, where weaponising of institutions and the judiciary's rather pusillanimous behaviour on occasions at various levels has not only made any sustainable resistance to it—at the electoral level, as well as at the social level—difficult.

A new feature of the present state of affairs is not that the persons in authority are ready to pounce upon any dissenting voice but there are hordes of people—reminiscent of the storm troopers in Nazi Germany—who are acting as the extended hand of the government.

Critics tend to compare the situation with the internal emergency clamped by the Indira Gandhi regime but normally forget to underline the qualitative difference between then and now.

Question arises what should be done today?

The first and foremost thing is to be fearless, Nirbhaya.

Everybody should bear in mind what the legendary activist across the border Sabeen Mahmood had written somewhere: 'Fear is just a line in your head, You can choose what side of that line you want to be'. Sabeen Mahmood was similarly assassinated by Islamists with due support from Pakistan's deep state, merely two years before Gauri's murder, for daring to raise questions and prepare an atmosphere of debate and discussion and dialogue in the country.

Illusion of any sorts among thinking people in this part of world will be disastrous in the long run.

For one thing fascination for Hindu Rashtra is not limited to RSS or various Hindutva activists; its fascination exists among what can be called as liberal sections also.

The idea that if Jews can have their nation, Muslims can have their nation has a deep resonance even

among a section of otherwise liberal Hindus.

The third important feature of the unfolding situation which is evident elsewhere as well is the fact that with deepening of democracy in the country, with democracy becoming more vigorous, it has facilitated emergence and strengthening of majoritarian forces through those very democratic route, which themselves are hell bent on weakening, subverting of that route and hollowing out of the various institutions.

A fourth important feature of the present juncture is the unholy alliance of Champions of Hindu Rashtra and crony capitalism is in full view today. It is not for nothing that leading opposition party claims that it is a government of 'Hum Do, Hamare Do'—alluding to the dominance of the Modi -Shah at the political level and likes of Adani and Ambani at the level of economy.

The first and foremost thing should be to give an electoral defeat to these forces of exclusion, hatred.

For this to happen it is important that political formations—who still believe in the Vision of the Constitution and are opposed to India becoming a Hindu Rashtra should build broad based alliances.

It is clear that an electoral victory to formations with a pluralist, inclusive agenda cannot be long lasting unless the deep rooted biases in the social mind are cleansed. For this to happen it is important that work at social-cultural level is also enhanced in very many ways.

With thousands of schools propagating its agenda—right from the Ekal Vidyalaya at the grassroots level where the single teacher himself—who also doubles up as an activist of the formation—to top institutions, it has been possible for the rightwing forces to carve out an entire generation according to their own agenda of exclusion. □□□

## A TRIBUTE

## Nityapriya Ghosh

*Someswar Bhowmik*

**E**XTREMELY POLITE AND suave in manners but equally ruthless and often caustic in his expressions—this in a nutshell defines Nityapriya Ghosh, who passed away on 7th September at the age of 87. In his passing the world of critical thinking around us has become poorer.

For around five decades he has been praised and reviled for unrelentingly cross-checking and questioning facts about Tagore as if it were a pastime—“I can’t give away my right to question. Tagore never gave away his.” In raising those questions he often sounded irreverent, but he knew his facts like he knew the palm of his own hands. What exasperated the reverential minds were his interpretations which were definitely out of the box, although based on objectivity and solid logic. He was a Tagore scholar par excellence but with a difference. His reasoned aversion to the idolisation of the person has mostly been construed as disrespect and dismissed, which is hardly an ideal way to sustain a discourse and enrich the intellectual environment.

However he did not confine himself to what his critics have termed as Tagore-baiting. He had his unique perception about iconic personalities and events. He used it to the hilt no matter what to present before his readers an unusual, and often unpalatable, perspective. Call it western-style iconoclasm or India’s millennia-old argumentative trait, he revelled in ruffling feathers left, right or centre with élan and then sat back enjoying the brickbats with a wry smile.

Born on December 3, 1934 in Barisal town (now in Bangladesh),

Nityapriya was the fifth child of Manindra Kumar Ghosh (1898-1991), a philologist-educationist with progressive ideas, who interacted regularly with high-profile cultural figures of Bengal, including Tagore. Chronic ill-health during childhood and adolescence affected Nityapriya’s school education. Partition also intervened. After the turmoil, when his family finally settled down in Calcutta he appeared for the Matriculation Examination from Hindu School (1951), finished graduation from the Presidency College (1955) and completed post-graduation from the University of Calcutta (1957). In his professional life he straddled three diverse worlds, first working, briefly, as a lecturer in English with the West Bengal Higher Education Service, and then having another brief tenure in the Defence Estates Services, before shifting to a career in corporate publicity and public relations. In this final incarnation he worked with the multinational Bata Shoe Company and the public sector United Commercial Bank, before retiring from service in 1992.

He was as brilliant in his academic career as he was successful in his professional life. But while his academic brilliance and professional successes are realm-specific and temporal, the impact of his intellectual acumen and works have defied boundaries and temporality.

His foray into the intellectual world began while working as an assistant editor in 1966-1967 at *Now*, a radical socio-cultural weekly with focus on analytical writing, under Samar Sen as his editor. When Samarbabu founded *Frontier*, a weekly with a more strident voice

and political outlook in 1968, Nityapriya followed him there and continued to contribute on a wide range of subjects. For both these publications he regularly wrote anonymous editorials, and used a cryptic nom de plume if he had to write longer pieces occasionally. Being mostly on the payroll of the government those days he had to resort to this in order to avoid legal complications for being critical of the prevalent system of governance. Only once did he make an exception to this self-imposed anonymity while reporting on the devastations wreaked by the floods of river Teesta across North Bengal districts in 1968.

Samar Sen in fact was more a mentor to Nityapriya than an editor. So Nityapriya was the natural choice to write a monograph on Sen for *Sahitya Akademi* soon after his death in 1987.

Since the early 1970s he began contributing regularly to journals and newspapers, writing on current affairs, culture and media, both in English and Bengali, and irrespective of their reach and readership. One element of his USP was a lucid style, combining racy prose with crisp expressions. But lest his readers be carried away by such facile use of language, he packed the pieces with sufficient antidotes of acerbity and pungency to give them a sense of the real world people live in. He loved being critical without being malicious. At the same time his critical persona was not ostentatious.

His first monograph, *Biplober Katha* (The Story of Revolutions, 1973), was on the Marxist interpretation of revolutions in different geographical locations and historical eras as a social game changer. On the evidence of this debut publication, which was purely an academic exercise, Nityapriya has often been dubbed as a leftist. But in reality, he turned

out to be an unwavering non-conformist, always at war with myths, anomalies and contradictions surrounding events and personalities.

He truly found his mettle when he delved into his research on Tagore. An overwhelming majority of his publications centres on Tagore and his diverse activities. And this is where he carved a niche for himself. However, it is high time his commentaries on media and media personalities were compiled properly. These include pieces on books, authors, cinema, theatre, television and their practitioners. These are relatively less known than his much more impactful writings on Tagore. But these are equally incisive and insightful, and need to be preserved for their intrinsic values.

Lately Nityapriya has been writing reminiscences and memoirs both to the delight and fright of his readers. Some of these narratives shed nostalgic lights on vignettes of the times in which he was growing and working. But his last published book, *Thikana Khat* (2022, Address Bedstead) is a no-holds-bar throwback to his personal experiences in a post-

colonial urban society and polity. The apparently hilarious or jovial tone of the anecdotes only tones down his sarcasm on the transformation of perceptions and value systems in rapidly changing times. It is in a league of its own as an important social document.

Knowing the person that he was, nothing could have been more appropriate than this brilliant sign-off.

#### **FRONTIER AND NPG**

##### **Ashis Lahiri adds:**

For us, the greenhorns of the late sixties and early seventies of the last century, Nityapriya Ghosh was nothing short of a phenomenon. His apparently laconic and iconoclastic, but essentially profound comments (e.g., just like there can't be a Marxist shovel or bucket, there can't be any Marxist aesthetics) were just gobbled up by us and debated ad infinitum, until the arrival of the next kick.

The Bengali word Nityapriya means 'ever-dear'; but we used to say he was noted for his ever-unpleasant acerbic remarks. He simply didn't care what the accepted wisdom was, what would people think

of yet another outrageous attack on that wisdom. It is thus obvious that NPG and Frontier were as it were made for each other. The great editor Samar Sen had found in him just what the doctor ordered: a learned man with a fine literary sense and wit, an excellent writer of English prose, a fearless pen and a down to earth sense of reality, including politics. On top of that he was marked by an unflinching loyalty to the cause. And yet, he was not hesitant to question his editor's decisions. One remembers that when at the insistence of Samar Sen, one had made a rather laboured positive review of a public stage play by Soumitra Chatterjee, NPG rebuked one for 'praising an essentially shallow' production. Personally, however, he was the embodiment of kindness and sympathy for youngsters, even when he differed from them. These traits he maintained till the last day of his life. His departure is, in a sense, the end of a fearless era, when the pen really mattered and the term intellectual had not become profaned. Love and regards, Nityapriyada. □□□

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#### **THE ELEVEN MUSKETEERS**

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## **Honouring the Culprits**

**Ram Puniyani**

**G**UJARAT CARNAGE (2002) was one of the major acts of anti Minority violence. It was a catastrophe which took the degree of violence, hate and ghettoisation to higher degree. Much before the violence the term, "Gujarat: Laboratory of Hindu Rashtra" was well popularised. On the pretext of Godhra train burning; Gujarat carnage was unleashed in which over one thousand people lost their lives. As per the sting operation by Ashish Khetan of Tehelka, likes of Babu Bajrangji said that they

were given three days. Bajrangji also said that he was feeling like Maharana Pratap while doing the killings. General Zamiruddin Shah stated that the army was kept waiting for long time, before it could do its job of curtailing the violence. Just to recall that the likes of Babu Bajrangji got bail on some grounds and as a reflection rot in the justice system, Maya Kodnani, who incited the violence and was given life imprisonment, has also been given bail. Interestingly Teesta Setalvad who fought for the victims was sent to

jail though she is now out on conditional bail.

The mayhem well supported by the state; was the conclusion of the 'Citizens tribunal' headed by Justice Sawant. One of the cases which initially got justice was that of Bilkis Bano. She and her family ran to the fields where the mobs traced them. Bilkis, her mother and sister were gang raped. Seven of her family members died in the cruel attack. Bilkis who was five months pregnant was left for dead.

Fortunately she was alive and without clothes when left by the marauding mob. She collected all her courage and fought for justice, helped by dedicated social workers. This led to the life imprisonment of

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eleven, who were punished for the most heinous crime in 2008. Now one of the guilty approached the Supreme Court for remission. SC in its 'wisdom' directed the Gujarat government to take the call, forgetting that the case was transferred to Maharashtra as the possibility of justice was ruled out in Gujarat.

Now as on 15th August 2022 Prime Minister Narendra Modi talked of Nari Shakti, these eleven culprits were released with a grand welcome, garlands, sweets and all that.

During their prison term they used to get frequent parole and frighten the eye witnesses. Now with them set free, Bilkis Bano is totally shattered. Many Muslims in the area are leaving their homes for more secure areas, i.e. to form new ghettos. This decision by SC and Gujarat state has been analysed as something which is against law and human morality.

The response to this retrograde legal and political step by the system, overseen and infiltrated by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has invited severe response from civil society. Congress has come forward to condemn it. BJP seems to have done this to intensify polarisation and to capitalise it for the forthcoming Gujarat elections.

Media is displaying deafening silence on the issue. PM is silent on the issue for electoral reasons. True, Khushboo Sunder, Shanta Kumar from BJP have condemned the whole episode, else this national shame finds no place in BJP discourse. Many women's groups and other human rights groups have protested strongly but to no avail so far.

The Constitutional Conduct group, constituted by the retired civil servants in a strong letter have criticised the whole episode and called upon the Government to reverse the decision of Gujarat Government and put the culprits behind

the bar. There is also a petition signed by thousands who have not only criticised the SC and step taken by Gujarat Government.

PILs have been filed by Mahua Moitra, Subhashini Ali, Revathi Lall and Rooprekha Varma among others, expressing their anguish and pain at this humiliation of women's plight while talking of Nari Shakti.

The pervasive part of the whole episode is the honouring of the convicts with garlands and sweets. This seems to be in tune with the patriarchal values which are inherent part of the communal ideologies. All fundamentalisms, regard women as property of men. Communal violence is presented as a fight between two rival communities. Women here are regarded as property of the men, so violating and inflicting humiliation on the women of the religion of 'other community' are upheld and appreciated.

One recalls that in 1992-93 Mumbai violence, the women from majority community helped 'their' men by handing over minority women to their men (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2645576>). The fountainhead of Hindu nationalism, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar is currently being promoted by divisive politics. He was the first one to spell the treatment to the women of 'enemy community'. While writing about Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj he criticised Shivaji for returning the daughter-in-law of Bassien Subhedar (Muslim). She was part of the plunder by the Shivaji's army. Shivaji ordered his army to rerun her to her house. Savarkar in his scathing comment on Shivaji says that how did Shivaji forget that this was the time to take revenge!

The shame is not just that the convicts of Gujarat violence have been given bail etc (Maya Kodnani, Babu Bajrangji) and now these eleven culprits, but the mindset of community in giving them a welcome! The

**As Timir Basu is still seriously ill, he is not in a position to communicate with contributors and subscribers. Please bear with us.**

—Fr.

degeneration of social morality under the impact of Communal ideology is on the rise in exponential way. People have seen the accused of Mohammad Akhlaq murder was wrapped with tricolor by a central minister, Mahesh Sharma. Another central minister Jaswant Sinha honoured the lynching accused when they got bail and to cap it all Shambhulal Regar, the murderer of Afrazul was also upheld by a section of community, which raised funds for him.

The SC must respond to the PILs by Moitra, Varma and others and put these convicts back to where they belong, the prison. At the same time this communal mind set, seeped a criminal manifestation of patriarchal values needs to be combated while realising that Modi's pronouncements of Nari Shakti are hollow, the real Nari Shakti needs to be built by combating communal ideology and its component, the patriarchy! □□□

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## THE CHAMPION OF TRIPARTISM

## Ambedkar—the Architect of India’s Labour Laws

**Saji Narayanan C K**

**I**N AUGUST 1936, AMBEDKAR founded a new political party called the Independent Labour Party. He drafted an action programme to address the grievances of the landless, poor tenants, farmers and workers. In the initial election itself, fifteen out of seventeen candidates put up by the party succeeded including Dr Ambedkar. He got established as a reputed labour leader.

In 1938, the Congress Government presented the Industrial Disputes Bill with many anti-worker clauses in the Bombay Legislative Assembly. Dr Ambedkar accused the bill as “bad, bloody and blood-thirsty” since it restricted the right of the labourer to strike and made the strike illegal as well as impossible.

The bill also enabled the employer not to disclose his budget and sought to use police force against the workers. Still, the Congress Government went forward with the bill. As a part of the campaign against the law, a one-day strike was also held.

Dr Ambedkar took over the Labour portfolio as the Labour Member of the Viceroy’s Executive Council in 1942. In a reception, he said in humility that the high office held no charm for him and that he would be the first to quit if his efforts as Labour Member were unsuccessful in improving the conditions of workers of the country. Regarding the Government’s commitment to labour, Dr Ambedkar based his views on the recommendations of the Royal Commission, 1930 and the various Conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

Dr Ambedkar was the Champion of real tripartism in India. In 1942, he called the 4th Tripartite Indian Labour Conference (ILC) in New Delhi. Before that, only the Government representatives were there in the ILC. In his address, Dr Ambedkar

said: “It is for the first time in the history of these labour conferences that the representatives of the employers and employees have been brought face to face within the ambit of a joint conference”.

The objects of the ILC 1942 were the formulating of a procedure for the settlement of industrial disputes and the discussion of matters of all-India importance as between Labour and Capital. Joint discussions in the ILCs brought fundamental changes in the outlook of the Government, employers and employees on labour issues.

Dr Ambedkar for the first time brought in the 8-hour working per day to India, bringing it down from 14 hours. He brought it in the 4th session of Indian Labour Conference held in New Delhi in 1942. He proposed holidays with pay for factory workers. He followed the English pattern of working hours of 48 hours per week in India.

For fixing minimum wages for labour, Dr Ambedkar drafted the ‘Minimum Wages Act’ in 1942 though it was enacted into law in 1948. Dr Ambedkar moved the Payment of Wages (Amendment) Bill in 1944. ‘Dearness Allowance’ (DA), ‘Leave Benefit’, ‘Revision of Scale of Pay’, extra payment for Overtime, subsidised food etc. are the contributions of Dr Ambedkar.

Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar formed an Advisory Committee to advise on matters arising out of the Labour Welfare under B P Agarkar. As a labour Minister, he invited Mr V V Giri, the then president of the AITUC, to head the commission on ‘Forced labour’. Among East Asian countries, India was the first nation to bring insurance for the well-being of employees through the Employees State Insurance (ESI) Act.

The first document on social in-

surance was ‘Report on Health Insurance’ submitted to the ILC of 1942. Dr Ambedkar has contributed the ‘Coal and Mica Mines Provident Fund’ and the ‘Mica Mines Labour Welfare Fund, 1946’. He has also contributed to the making of Employees Provident Fund Law. He brought an amendment to the Workmen’s Compensation Act of 1923. In 1944, Dr Ambedkar initiated the amendment to the Factories Act of 1934 with several modifications. It was Ambedkar again, who introduced canteen and medical facilities inside the factory etc.

Before coal mines maternity law was presented, Dr Ambedkar, as a Labour Member, went to the coalfields in Dhanbad to study the working conditions. He inspected both surface and underground conditions of work and went 400 feet underground.

It is because of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar that workers can go on strike for their rights. In 1943, Dr Ambedkar introduced the ‘Indian Trade Unions (Amendment) Bill’ for compulsory recognition of trade unions. The Industrial Disputes Act, which is the basic labour law of the country, was passed in 1947 and ESI Act passed in 1948; but was introduced in the Viceroy’s Council by Dr Ambedkar years back.

Chief Labour Commissioner, Provincial Labour Commissioners, Labour Inspectors etc. were first appointed during his tenure. The Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Bill was introduced in the central assembly by Dr Ambedkar and came into force on April 23, 1946. ‘Employment Exchanges’ were created by Dr Ambedkar in the name of ‘National Employment Agency’.

Ambedkar was instrumental in the establishment of the Reserve Bank of India in 1935. His ‘Industrial Statistical Act, 1942’ was enacted for assessing labour statistics in the matters of labour disputes, wage rates, income, inflation, debt, housing, employment, deposits and other funds.

Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar initiated many laws for women workers in India. They include 'Mines Maternity Benefit Act', 'Women Labour Welfare Fund', 'Women and Child Labour Protection Act', 'Maternity leave Benefit for Women Labour', as well as 'Restoration of Ban on Employment of Women on Underground Work in Coal Mines'.

Dr Ambedkar took steps to amend the Maternity Benefit Act. When the maternity benefit bill was introduced in the House, he said: "I believe that it is in the interest of the nation that the mother ought to get a certain

amount of rest during the prenatal period and also subsequently, and this Bill is based entirely on that principle". He advocated for equal pay for equal work, and he got success in the field of coal mines.

Ambedkar was a pioneer in India's skill development initiatives. He was instrumental in setting up the best Technical Training Scheme for Workers in India. On August 24, 1944 while in Calcutta he said: "This is the age of the Machine and it is only those countries in which technical and scientific training has risen to the highest pitch that will

survive in the struggle... The Technical Training Scheme not only maintained but extended all over the country and became a permanent part of the country's educational system". The current draft New Educational Policy also gives thrust to vocational education.

Dr Ambedkar has shown his brilliance by including Philosophy of social justice and labour rights in the Constitution. Dr Ambedkar wanted the subject of labour to be in the Union list as he stressed the need for uniformity of labour laws. But it could not be achieved. □□□

## LETTERS

### 'Tamil Nationalism'

I think that the article (Tamil Nationalism, Frontier, August 28-September 3, 2022) by Mr K Rasingam is a rather biased and even distorted version of events.

There are key aspects of the national question that such narratives knowingly skip.

I hope that Frontier will take an interest in offering a balanced view of the subject, without compromising on denouncing the misdeeds of the state.

Sivanandam Sivasegaram

### An Appeal

*[This appeal is addressed to all peoples' movements, organisations and activists, all civil society organisations, public intellectuals and all who hold the Constitution as the most sacred text, all who dream to see India beyond caste, creed, language and political partisanship, all who have inherited the great civilisation and care for its future.]*

From September 7th 2022, Bharat Jodo Yatra, a Padayatra of 3500 kms from Kanyakumari to Kashmir is being organised by the Indian National Congress. The objective of the Yatra is to stir the conscience of the people in times when the constitutional values and democratic norms are being brazenly undermined and

the very idea of India has come under a systematic assault.

Never before have had the values of the Republic faced as heinous an assault as they have in the recent past.

Never before have hate, division and exclusion unleashed on us with such impunity.

Never before have we been subjected to surveillance, propaganda and disinformation at this scale.

Never before has the nation seen a regime so callous to the plight of the people while the economy lies in ruins, propped up only by a few favoured cronies.

Never before have had the real nation-builders—an overwhelming majority of the farmers and workers, Dalits and Adivasis—faced such effective exclusion in the shaping of the nation's future.

The Bharat Jodo Yatra takes place in the context of this grave national crisis. The Congress party has appealed to all "like minded political parties [and] civil society groups... to unite and join the Bharat Jodo Yatra". Taking note of this appeal and recognising the dire need for such an initiative, a conclave was organised on 22nd of August in Delhi by nearly 200 representatives of people's movements. After a day-long deliberation, that included a dialogue with the

Yatra organisers in the Congress party, the conclave unanimously welcomed this initiative. Expressing broad solidarity with the initiative, it was agreed to engage with this yatra and issue an appeal to everyone in the civil society to join hands with it.

Yogendra Yadav, September 4

### Bail for Teesta Setalvad

A small, and maybe transient, yet very significant victory.

Kudos to this extremely gritty fighter—a Padma awardee, for human rights and communal amity.

Deserves a hero's welcome!

Activist Teesta Setalvad was released from jail in Ahmedabad on September 3, 2022, a day after the Supreme Court granted her interim bail in a case of allegedly fabricating evidence related to the 2002 Gujarat riots. She was arrested on June 26, and had been lodged in the Sabarmati Central Jail.

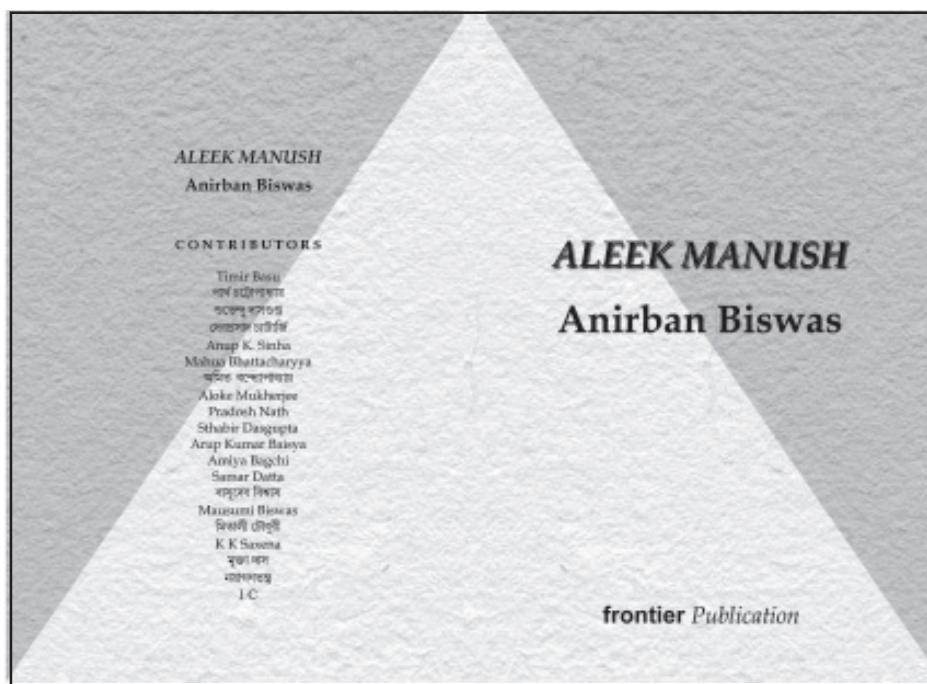
As per the SC order, she was produced before sessions judge V A Rana for bail formalities.

"The sessions court imposed two conditions over and above the conditions imposed by the apex court. The sessions court asked the accused to furnish a personal bond of Rs 25,000 and not to leave India without its prior permission", special public prosecutor Amit Patel said.

Sukla Sen

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