

# frontier

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**W**ITH GLOBAL MILITARY EXPENDITURE REACHING RECORD highs in 2021, before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it is increasingly clear that the military industrial complex is once more moving into the position of what Dwight Eisenhower termed 'unwarranted influence'.

Across the world, militarism (and the mountains of money this entails) is again on the rise. The United States has already provided billions of dollars in security assistance to Ukraine since the war began. Germany has rapidly increased defence spending in response to Putin's war and there are increasingly loud calls from Scandinavian countries to join NATO.

Behind this state expenditure are, of course, the lobbying efforts of the industry's most powerful corporate players. It was reported that in 2020 alone, five US corporations—Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grunman, Raytheon Technologies and General Dynamics—spent \$60 million pressuring politicians in the US. Yet this corporate power does not fully explain the military industrial complex's sustained grip on political and economic life. The manufacturing corporations, inevitably, pursue profit. And they have created a share market boom. America controls more than 30 percent of the global arms trade while Russia is not far behind—it controls 20 percent of global arms sales. With the Ukraine war prolonging new players have entered the market. China apart even tiny North Korea is now supplying missiles to Russia that finds it difficult to get rid of the quagmire called 'special military operations' against Ukraine. And now Iran has come in a big way to supply its effective Saheed-136 Drones to Russia. In Europe all the major NATO players—France, Britain and Germany—have stepped up defence production. It is war economy everywhere while CoP-27 that began on November 6 in Egypt gets less focus. For one thing the Ukraine war has set back green house gas emission targets across the globe spiraling inflation and cost of living and making lives miserably in the so-called developed and underdeveloped countries.

The intelligence services, think tanks, university departments and private companies all have a role to play. Trade unions, concerned with defending members' jobs, have also contributed to a sustained militarism. Workers engaged in defence industries throughout the world never protest against war and it is a tragedy!

In the economically important area of arms sales, embassies provide local contacts, with diplomats and defence attachés lubricating sales

processes wherever they can. Corporations also maintain very close links with the civil service, with secondments of personnel, principally from the former to the latter. The same is the case with uniformed military staff, except that transit from the military to corporations is most common.

Private military companies have become much more useful in the post-9/11 world, and they rely heavily on former military personnel, especially Special Forces.

Revolving doors between sectors are especially useful in cementing relationships. Former military and civil servants gravitate to think tanks and university departments, and senior military and civil servants approaching retirement are much in demand by the arms corporations. Retainers, consultancies and even seats on boards are delightful carrots, especially with the early retirement ages and lack of bonuses in the public sector. Politicians, too, (both serving and retired) benefit from the revolving door, with people

from both major parties grasping the opportunities.

The nature of political culture regarding security has also been important in sustaining the military industrial complex. That culture privileges national security as the prime imperative to which other needs should be subordinated. It scarcely recognises security as a common right. National interests are defined by the political establishment, including corporate business interests, with the narrative typically dominated by a small and exclusive elite, to the exclusion of other voices. There is often a strong theme of national status with a premium on making Britain (or the US, France, Turkey, India) great again.

The overall culture, driven as it is by profit, is essentially short-term and concentrates on military threats, overlooking outstanding fundamental challenges such as climate breakdown and severe socio-economic inequality. In this culture the overall intention is to have control over the

strategic environment primarily through offensive military capabilities and alliances.

The sheer concentration of power and influence that resides in the military industrial complex has to be dismantled if progressives are going to succeed in encouraging new approaches relevant to global human needs. But it is a tall order. Communist and socialist parties are so weak and ideologically bewildered that the possibility of an international peace movement seems next to impossible. Only silver-lining is that there are some strong campaigning groups and individual scholars that throw light on the nature of the security complex, the Campaign Against the Arms Trade being one example. In times of crisis, such as these, it is imperative to think beyond the status quo and replace the institutions that got people across the world here. In the case of the military industrial complex, there is an irrefutable argument to rethink the entire system. □□□ [Contributed]

10-11-2022

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## COMMENT

### Lula, like a Phoenix

LULA'S ELECTORAL RETURN, winning the presidential election, is almost like a Phoenix.

The former metal worker turned Union leader turned leading politician with an anti-imperialist brand turned symbol of hope to millions in Brazil and far, distant lands was booked and banished on false charge of corruption.

But Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva came out from behind bar. He re-occupied central stage of Brazil politics, a difficult area to compass with its scores of divisions and sub-divisions and sub-sub-divisions. It takes longer minutes to count the number of political parties and groups and sub-groups in the Brazilian political

theater. No doubt, all of these represent intents and interests. This makes alignments in politics difficult.

The pandemic scene created another complex of equations to comprehend – the Right camp's so much indifference to life of the commoners leading to one of the top-most spots at the pandemic-death-list in the world, the right camp's corruption, loot and persecution of people that surpass many countries, that appears fascist, the unrestrained expropriation of a vast commons – the Amazon – leading to harming this Earth, although there's a long, powerful and organized movement of a big part of the poor,

but the right camp pulled a huge number of votes in the presidential election, a part of the right, once one of the factions the Empire trusted most, veered closer to Moscow while the Empire and all in its orbit took aggressively anti-Moscow measures. These make equations in the socio-political scene a complex.

But the economic scene is as it was years-back – increasing poverty and inequality, deprivation and exploitation. Indicators that help understand the level of comfort or hardship in the commoners' life show the subalterns are unabatedly pressed down. Whatever progress, noteworthy, Lula and his successor, Dilma Rousseff, made during their terms in presidential office has been washed away by the Rightist onslaught that usurped power by pushing out Lula years back.

Yet strange – the Right carry substantial power, in term of number, in the legislative branch. What does constitute this segment of power in a part of the state? No reason to assume that that goes without class power – a class owning a power to capture a portion of the legislative assembly influencing political decisions impacting allocation of fund.

Bolsonaro, the defeated Rightist leader, carries support among a part of elites, and a good number of truckers. The truckers exhibited their power by blocking more than 300 roads across the country rejecting the election result. Only Bolsonaro could pursue the truckers to withdraw the blockades. There're the transportation and agri-business lobbies in the country, one of the world's largest food exporters. This helps picture a part of the coming political actions and reactions after Lula begins his term.

This will, consequently, impact Lula's political journey while sitting on the presidential chair. And, the future of a major part of the Left in

Brazil will not go untouched.

The big economy in Latin America, a major part of the BRICS, has many potentialities to impact geopolitics stretching continents. That might be positive for people strengthening the anti-imperialist trend.

Whatever path Lula succeeds or fails to tread, stumbles or steadfastly moves, a major impact will be in Latin America. People's struggles for democracy and a life with dignity, their struggles to push out imperialism – spaces for people will get impact of Lula's success or failure. Cuba, the exemplary country in the world, will have wider opportunity to widen its space for building up an economy better than the Empire, the island-country's biggest enemy, if Lula succeeds in materialising aspirations of peoples in Brazil and in other lands.

But, with the Brazilian political equations and imperialist tricks and conspiracies, Lula's march will be difficult. Moreover, his conciliatory moves to neutralise hostile forces, his political manoeuvres may con-

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fuse sections of his friends; even lead them to abandon his tent. For Lula, moments ahead are treacherous. □□□ 06-11-2022

### NOTE

## The Living Dead

*Bharat Dogra writes:*

**V**ICTIMS OF OCCUPATIONAL diseases suffer all too frequently from neglect, resulting in extremely distressing conditions for them. Hence a recent campaign involving activists, judiciary and some state governments, particularly Rajasthan government, has appeared like a rare ray of hope. This campaign shows how significant benefits can reach workers suffering from silicosis, one of the most serious and common occupational diseases, once sincere efforts are made.

Directions by the Supreme Court supported by earlier efforts of the

National Human Rights Commission have given new hope to tens of thousands of silicosis patients and other workers threatened by this occupational disease, and a lot of credit also goes to the activists as well as some sympathetic officials who worked with great commitment to take these benefits to workers toiling and living in remote places.

The Rajasthan government in particular should get the due credit for very helpful and well formulated policy. This has helped several workers or their families to get benefits ranging from Rs 3 lakh to Rs 5 lakh, apart from monthly pension of Rs

1500 and some other benefits as well.

Earlier several social activists and public spirited lawyers made an important contribution to legal battles fought in several courts. S A Azad, a senior social and labour activist from PRASAR social organisation, has been knocking on the doors of human rights commissions, courts and governments for almost two decades to take the message of long-suffering silicosis victims to them. He says, "After initial years of neglect it is heartwarming to see that at last the judiciary is so active to help silicosis workers, but good decisions of the Supreme Court have to be supported by grassroots work so that workers or their families actually benefit from these decisions."

Such an effort was recently vis-

ible in Rajasthan when in the course of a wider campaign for ensuring accountability or jawabdehi, social activists in several parts of Rajasthan contacted silicosis affected workers or their family members and helped them in obtaining long overdue compensation payment. Their experience revealed that funds for this purpose were available in some districts but were not being utilised properly. This may well be true for some other areas as well. The fund utilisation improved significantly with the intervention of activists belonging to organisations like the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathna (MKSS).

Senior activist Nikhil Dey who met several silicosis affected workers in the course of these efforts says, "In some cases workers looked like the living dead—they were so weak and thin. I realised what a serious disease this is and how acute are the sufferings of a very large number of affected workers"

The Atlas of Rural Health released by the Jan Swasthya Sahyog says that silicosis is not just a problem of larger industries and cities but it is also widely prevalent in

many rural and semi-rural areas as well. The major industries prone to silicosis are: stone quarries and crushers, quartz mining, foundries, sand blasting, ceramics, gem cutting and polishing, slate and pencil, construction, mining and glass manufacturing where workers are exposed to the risk of inhaling fine crystals of silica, leading to damage of lungs and fibrosis of tissues. A report of the Indian Council of Medical Research said that about thirty lakh or three million workers face a high risk of exposure to silica dust.

One area of intervention is to make available financial compensation to surviving workers, or families of workers who have died in the recent past. Medical rehabilitation of workers affected by silicosis to the extent possible is another area of intervention. However even bigger possibilities of reduction of disease exist in taking adequate and carefully advised steps for the prevention of this disease in various industries and occupations. The National Human Rights Commission has said that the occupational hazard of silicosis is preventable if working condi-

tions are properly regulated, proper warnings and information are provided and if proper protective gear and equipment are also available.

Recent directives of the Supreme Court have taken into account all these possibilities. In addition the Central Pollution Control Board prepared proposals for reducing the incidence of silicosis in the quartz grinding industry in Gujarat and elsewhere. Such steps need to be extended to other industries and occupations where there is significant risk of silicosis.

The high level of interest taken by the Supreme Court of India in providing relief and protection to silicosis workers and their families has opened up opportunities for affected workers and their families like never before.

However at the same time this reality cannot be ignored that those who remain to be reached and helped are many times more than those to whom help could be taken so far. Improvement of preventive aspects also leaves much to be desired. What remains to be done is much more than what has been done so far. □□□

## POLEMICS

# Democracy and Fascism in the Indian Context

*K Murali (Ajith)*

**W**HEN A PEOPLE ARE faced with a fascist onslaught, like the one people are witnessing in India today, a whole lot of social potential gets unleashed and channels for action are opened up. Large sections of people, hitherto socially passive, are summoned into political life. The possibility for unity among diverse forces, earlier unthinkable, is now something pressing for actualisation. Democracy becomes the catchword for all those arrayed against fascism. Depending on one's

views on what democracy is, this could be articulated either as its defence or as an endeavour to realise it. The definition of democracy then would become a matter of contention, even among those who declare against fascism.

Bourgeois democracy with its institutions like a parliament, independent judiciary and constitutionally assured rights has a history of just two centuries in the developed world. Fascism, as ideology and form of rule, has an even shorter history. In

the normal functioning of bourgeois democracy the violence of the State is veiled. When summoned into action it is presented as an exceptional step called for by exceptional conditions; by a situation where the so-called 'rule of law' has been upset. This is the norm of bourgeois democracy. Fascism subverts this notion. The exceptional is now made out as the common place. Employing all means of propaganda, fascism projects a society threatened by the 'others', by internal or external enemies. This threat is even actualised through manufactured events, including staged acts of terror. These then become the justification for continuous, open, state violence and the suppression of democratic rights. Not just state violence, the violence of



fascist mobs against the 'others' too is legitimised as the new normal of social existence. A 'rigid concept of life' is made explicit as unbending norms of social behaviour and political life. All diversities get branded as defilement of an assumed 'national ideal'. All dissent is stamped as treachery.

There are a number of intellectuals who place the roots of fascism in the moral realm, in the 'evil' present in humankind. This denies or at the minimum dilutes its class character. Evil is no doubt present in all humans. But it is not something a-historical or a-social. It is, and has always been, a social, historical construct. As Marx accurately observed, the human essence is an ensemble of social relations. If fascism is to be dealt in terms of evil and good, then that too has to be done in class terms, and, in our context, in caste terms.

The turn to fascism in the imperialist metropolis came about in a period of in-tense political and economic crisis. This is true of the present period also. The bankruptcy of the neo-liberal model made explicit by the financial crisis of 2008 and the prolonged recession seen since then has once again brought out many variants of fascism in these countries. One sees this not just in political platforms of the far-Right, but even in the actions and thinking of mainstream political parties. Thus, the significance of Trump in the USA is perhaps more to be noted in the continuing support he enjoys within the Republican Party and its social base, rather than in the obnoxious misuse of power of the man himself. Now, whole groups of Black and Hispanic voters are being disenfranchised there, all very constitutionally. It would be quite appropriate to recall that this mainstreaming of fascism too has its precedents. Mussolini and his fascist hordes were funded by none other than the British state,

with the full knowledge of the Conservative Party's leadership. While the pandemic worsened the economic problems, particularly the lives of the masses, it also brutally exposed the anti-human nature of neo-liberalism's privatisation pillar and the fragile nature of its globalisation. Meanwhile, the pandemic was also put to use by the rulers to perfect tools of mass surveillance and control. Wild speculations about the origins of the Corona virus were quickly co-opted into racist and xenophobic propaganda, which in turn fed the fascist milieu.

The switch over from a formal electoral system with constitutionally assured rights to their blatant suppression has an economic dimension even in an oppressed country. The difference lies in the near total permanence of economic distress. The modern ruling classes of the oppressed countries quite often internalise elements of the fascist ideology. It is blended with the autocratic, 'rule by edict' system of rule, commonly seen in the past under feudal regimes all over the world. Imperialist countries too witnessed aspects of the 'rule by edict' system of feudal polity under fascist regimes like those of Hitler and Mussolini. 'Rule by edict' replaced bourgeois democracy's 'rule of law' and 'formal equality'. But there is a qualitative difference between these two types of countries. This stems from persisting semi-feudal socio-economic and cultural relations seen in the Third world. As a result, even when forms of bourgeois rule like the parliamentary system exist, they are inherently flawed. The seamless makeover from modern forms of bourgeoisie governance to feudal autocratic ones is a permanent feature in these types of countries. However, it manifests differently. In the urban centres, and particularly for the middle classes and upper classes, 'the rule of law' is the norm, mostly. But in the rural areas,

and especially for those at the bottommost levels of society, law is given by the local oppressors. They are ably assisted by modern instruments of 'lawful government', like the police and local bodies like the panchayats. More often than not, their raw violence with all of its reactionary in-humanness is a permanent presence. It usually becomes the determining factor.

Even then, the suspension of electoral democracy and constitutionally assured rights, accompanied by the blatant suppression of democratic rights stands out as a distinct event. Nowadays, it inevitably summons up broad mass resistance. This is a reflection of the growth of democratic awareness among the masses. It is an outcome of their own struggles as well as the awareness they have gained through the wider global flow of information. The ruling classes are well aware of this. Therefore they consciously prepare political, cultural grounds for the formal realisation of their planned fascist takeover. Formal realisation means the adoption of fascist rule as a legitimate, constitutionally sanctioned, form of governance. This inevitably includes the

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formal suspension of all democratic rights, rights of the workers and even those of the ruling class political opposition. That is where the country is being pushed to by the RSS through the Modi regime. But it is yet to come. Therefore, one must necessarily distinguish between the trend and the moment. Strong elements of fascist rule are increasingly present. But the situation is still not like what it was under the Emergency of 1975-'77 period.

The Emergency was the first instance of a formal enforcement of fascist rule by the Indian ruling classes. Suspension of democratic rights, accompanied with rule by the repressive organs of the state, enjoying unrestricted powers, was not new in all those regions of the country where revolutionary or national liberation movements had come up. The Emergency was countrywide. All opposition, including that of the parliamentary variety, came under its suppressive boots. The context for this extreme step was the legitimacy crisis faced by the state, the crisis in the

long-standing hege-monic consensus evolved under Gandhi and further supplemented by Nehru. It had started to face severe strain from the 1960s onwards. Claims of developing an inde-pendent Indian nation were increasingly exposed by visible signs of imperialist de-pendency. The legitimacy of the ruling classes' state was challenged by struggles of the masses and national movements. The Naxalbari armed peasant rebellion shook up the whole country. Attempting to repair and restore the hege-monic consensus, the Congress led by Indira Gandhi, tried out a mix of populism coupled with fascist rule. This was the politics of the Emergency. Though this was met with resistance from a wide array of forces, it is noteworthy that this wasn't the main factor leading to the withdrawal of the Emergency. The return to the normal functioning of the electoral system was mainly prompted by some particularities of this country.

The first of these is its extreme social fragmentation with its abundance of castes, communal groupings, nationalities, ethnicities and regional identities. The second one is the absence of a dominant nationality or cohesive social group that could be made the social base of the state. Neither the 'Hindi belt', nor the Savarna Hindus, or even the Hindus as a whole can satisfy this need. Each of them is riven with divisions. Greater doses of Brahmanism only go to harden them, even as they join up against the 'other', the Muslims.

These are the unique conditions of Indian society which make the parliamentary system eminently suitable for the ruling classes. It allows some distribution of governmental power and opportunity to corner a share of the spoils of exploitation. It has the potential to accommodate various echelons of the exploitative classes, even some layers of the middle classes, and of course, varying patterns of caste representation. All of

this can be done while maintaining and exercising the overall hegemony of the ruling classes.

Democracy is often equated to the parliamentary system and India is celebrated by many as the largest democracy in the world. The proof proffered is its seven and a half decades old parliamentary system, with regular elections, at least till the State level. Yet, even if one tries to verify this claim with the yardstick of parliamentary democracy the result would be quite contrary. Take the standard of 'one person, one vote'. In India, the application of this principle produces results quite opposite to the promise of political equality (even if formal) that it is supposed to assure. As warned by Dr BR Ambedkar, what it actually does is to reproduce a 'permanent communal majority'. An examination of the caste composition of the Lok Sabha proves him correct. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has replaced the Congress as the main political representative of the ruling classes. So long as the Congress was in that position it enjoyed solid backing from the Savarna Hindus. They have now shifted their allegiance to the BJP. Meanwhile, the new Lok Sabha too remains overwhelmingly Savarna Hindu. Their share in MPs is nearly half of the total. Though the political dispensation has changed, the communal majority enjoyed by the Savarna Hindus throughout the nearly seven decades of the Indian parliamentary system remains unchanged.

This then is the context in which one must situate and analyse the fascism presently being promoted in India, by the Sangh Parivar through the Modi government. It is an out-growth of the reactionary foundations on which the Indian parliamentary system rests.. But that is not all. Under the Sangh Parivar dispensation it has acquired a distinct hue and doubly venomous content. This makes it appropriate to name it

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Brahmanist Hinduvada fascism. But Brahmanism is by no means restricted to the Sangh Parivar. Therefore, to make an accurate analysis of this fascism it must be done in a broader context.

Brahmanism has always been at the core of the Indian ruling classes' ideological make up. It was a key ingredient during the emergence, coalescence and alliance forging of these classes during the British period, as ruling classes in the making/waiting. Yet this was not the Brahmanism of the Middle Ages, of caste-feudalism. Complying with the pressures and influences of colonial modernity, it was recast, remoulded. Moreover, throughout this period, in keeping with the changing demands to be addressed while shaping up the consensus being forged under the hegemony of these classes, its articulation and stance have been modified. Thus people see the passage from Tilak's aggressive Brahmanism to Gandhi's moderate one.

The aggressive Brahmanist stance advocated by the RSS and other Hinduvadi forces had existed parallel to the Gandhi-Nehru ideological theme from the beginning itself, all along vigorously contesting it. But that stream never gained traction among the ruling classes. In the aftermath of the Gandhi assassination it even faced severe isolation and suppression. Yet it was never completely excluded. On the contrary, it had always been allowed some space, even if limited. The passage of this aggressive Brahmanist stance from the margins to the dominant position it now enjoys in the hegemonic consensus of the ruling classes has been the most significant development in the Indian polity during the past few decades. It can be properly situated and understood only if it's viewed in the light of the legitimacy crisis of the Indian state and the direction taken in the recasting of the ruling classes' hegemonic consensus. Otherwise one

will remain trapped in the superficiality of parliamentary politics.

The recasting of the hegemonic consensus was accompanied by a conscious attempt to bind the Savarna Hindu castes into an all-India compact as the core social base of the state. Energetic promotion of 'national integration', vicious suppression of revolutionary movements and nationality struggles and aggressive expansionist acts against neighbouring countries – all of this was put to the service of fanning up national chauvinism, now openly given a Hindu communal colour. Over the years, the undertones of the new hegemonic consensus being shaped up became more and more apparent as an explicit Brahmanism, packaged as resurgent Hinduism.

There certainly has been a spike in attacks on Muslims under the Modi Raj. The unabashed justification of such attacks by their perpetrators, the apathy of government agencies, the socio-political-cultural milieu where such murderous incidents get accommodated as the 'new normal' – these are surely new developments. However, one must also not forget that they have their antecedents in decades' old state and non-state violence against Muslims and other religious minorities. This 'new normal' too needs to be situated in the socio-political process it has emerged from and which it further embellishes. Otherwise people would end up in simplistic and artificial divisions. The distinction sought to be made between a supposedly 'secular democratic' past and a threatening 'ethnic democratic' future is one such example.

Not just the BJP, political representatives of the ruling classes ranging across the whole spectrum from right to left, have endorsed and promoted the shift that India is witnessing. Remember, the attack on the Golden Temple, pogroms against the Sikhs, the opening of the Babri Masjid

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giving a boost to the RSS' plans eventually leading to its demolition – all of this took place under Congress rule. Rajiv Gandhi had symbolically launched one of his LS election campaigns from Ayodhya. This was also the period when a Supreme Court bench had conveniently declared 'Hindutva' to be a 'way of life', greatly aiding the RSS and other Hinduvadis. While the ruling classes as a whole endorsed the promotion of explicit Brahmanism, they differed among themselves (and still do) on the limits of its aggressiveness and the modes of its articulation.

The Sangh Parivar stands at an extreme in the explicit Brahmanism commonly endorsed by the ruling classes. However, it would be wrong to identify this as an 'exclusivist' position as opposed to some 'inclusiveness' favoured by others like the Congress. Brahmanism thrives on the graded assimilation of the 'other'. It excludes the 'other' from an equal status precisely by allowing such graded space to it. It privileges itself by what may be termed as an 'exclusivist inclusion'. There is therefore nothing new or unusual in the sermons of RSS leaders on being inclusive, even while their fascist minions go around lynching Muslims and Dalits. Modi's tacking on 'Sabka viswas' to his earlier spiel of 'Sabka saath, sabka vikas' is very much a part of this. Other than its extreme in aggressiveness, the shaping being given by the RSS to the hegemonic consensus has its own specificity. They are born of compulsions particular to it. To put its stamp, the RSS must recast it completely, displacing and marginalising the Gandhi-Nehru legacy.

Since the promotion of explicit Brahmanism is not something simply limited to Hinduvadi outfits like the RSS, it would be futile to seek weapons against it in the Congress or other parliamentary parties. Neither will they come from the Gandhi-Nehru arse-

nal. The task is to confront and undermine the ruling classes' hegemonic consensus being forged with explicit, aggressive, Brahmanism at its core. That cannot be fulfilled by seeking refuge in the moderate Brahmanism of the Gandhi-Nehru type. Moreover, the resistance to fascism has no obligation to defend this legacy against the Hinduvadis. The liberalism it displayed, the democracy it professed, was superficial. It avoided the basic issues of democratisation in our context, even those of a bourgeois nature.

Democracy, in the modern sense, came to the land through colonial modernity. As such, it was never free from this pedigree. People must therefore take a critical look at this modernity in order to understand democracy in Indian context. Colonial modernity was not identical to the one that emerged in Western European countries through their transition to capitalism. This much is usually admitted. Some have now started terming it as 'Indian modernity'. They perhaps assume that the qualifier 'Indian' would let them get away from having to account for the obnoxious persistence of caste-feudal values and relations. But that really doesn't solve anything. By their argument, 'Indian' must stand in as an omnibus term for all the pre-modern features seen in this variant. One might then very well say that this modernity is one where the modern cohabits at ease with the pre-modern. But that was the crux of the formulation 'colonial modernity'. Redubbing it as 'Indian' only serves to confuse the issue and takes a step back. What is needed is a deeper probing of colonial modernity. Is this merely a matter of a modernity that is incomplete? A modernisation process that couldn't be taken to its capitalist conclusion, because it took place under colonial conditions? No, this is not a matter of being incomplete. Rather, incompleteness is in-

herent to it. It is an inseparable aspect of this modernity. This is rooted in the specific characteristics of bureaucrat capitalism, the distinct type of capitalism engendered and nurtured by imperialism in the oppressed nations.

Imperialism did indeed transform caste-feudalism. But it was not interested in destroying it. It engendered bureaucrat capitalism, a specific type of capitalism that was indissolubly linked to caste-feudalism. Intertwining with imperialism and feudalism, bureaucrat capitalism serves both of them as well as the traditional type of rich peasants. In other words colonial modernisation had a dual, contradictory role. Bureaucrat capitalism continuously transformed various features of caste-feudalism and ushered in the new. Yet, simultaneously, it regenerated, resurrected, significant aspects of that old. Transformation through bureaucrat capitalism will never be complete. Bureaucratic capital indulges in transformation as well as consolidation/stabilisation only to suit its comprador interests. Hence both the processes will contain distorted features. This is the essential characteristic of colonial modernity. So long as the country continues to be under imperialist oppression, so long as bureaucrat capitalism remains operative, this dialectic of transformation/resurrection will persist.

All the old social movements which emerged under colonial modernity were afflicted by this duality. They tried to seize the opportunities provided by colonial modernisation. But they also internalised the limits imposed by that very social process. Within this one must distinguish between two broad streams, which may be broadly termed as the Savarna and Avarna streams. The former includes all those considered to be within the Varna frame, from Brahmin to Shudra castes like the Nair, Reddy, Patel, Maratha and so on. The latter encompasses all those



outside it. Presently that would mean the OBC, Dalit castes and Adivasis. Since caste is universally seen in all religious communities, this categorisation into the two streams applies to all of them. Savarna and Avarna, are related to their content, not the birth origins of the protagonists.

Savarna democracy was satisfied with modifications in caste-feudalism and the reworking of Brahmanism to suit the modern needs of the exploiters, new and old. It must not be confused or equated with the democratic values generated by the masses through their struggles or the rights they have gained through them. This may broadly be described as Avarna democracy. It addressed the basic issues of democratisation in our society. The movements that gave form to it dealt with the political, social, economic and cultural dimensions of democratisation at various levels, and in varying degrees. On the contrary, the movements of the Savarnas did not demand anything more than a reform of rituals, relations and institutions, including family that hampered the traditional rich and the emerging middle classes from availing new opportunities offered by colonial transformation. Beyond that, caste was not a burden but a useful social relation for their advance. But the Avarna stream could not but challenge the caste order itself. Any gain in class status would become of social value only through this. Alummoottil Channaar, coming from an Avarna caste, was the highest tax payer in the native kingdom of Thiruvithamkoor. He was able to buy a car and employ a driver. Yet, while passing temples on his way he had to get down and take a walking detour, to avoid causing pollution. Meanwhile, his driver, being a Nair (Savarna) could drive right across and wait for his employer. The driver, economically of lower status, enjoyed superior rights of passage, precisely

by virtue of his Savarna position. Whereas this was denied to the rich Channaar because he came from an Avarna caste. Evidently, his social status had to be elevated in caste terms if he were to enjoy the benefits of colonial modernity to their fullest extent. This was the dynamic driving the Avarna stream. It contained the potential for democratisation of society at a basic level.

The Savarna stream also contributed to democratisation to a certain extent. But, given its position in society, its vision of democratisation was severely restricted. This may be illustrated through the following example from Malayalam literature. O. Chandu Menon's famous novel *Indulekha* is considered a classic and ranked among the harbingers of Malayalee Renaissance. Its plot revolves around the love of a couple of Nair youngsters and the attempt made by a Namboodiri (Brahmin) to assert his caste privileges in order to make the girl his sambandham. Ultimately love wins. That plot certainly was a challenge to the existing caste order and its social norms. The individual and her/his right to choose a partner stand opposed to caste privilege. Yet, this democratic stance remained well within the then existing caste norms, within Brahmanist norms. The protagonists of the novel also happen to be betrothed by relation according to Nair customs. In other words there is both the breaking and reassertion of casteist norms. The difference is that the assertion came from the Nair's side, traditionally a Shudra caste. It thus reflected the upward movement of this caste, initiated in pre-colonial times and further advanced under colonial conditions. This is why it could aid democratisation.

Yet another instance of Savarna democracy in operation could be seen in the Malayalee Memorial of the 19th century. This was the first instance of civic action with its public gatherings and signature campaigns

in this part of the sub-continent. It was also the first time that a Malayalee identity was deployed in political discourse. Yet for all of those democratic, modern, features its actual content was the demand of the Savarna Nairs to regain administrative posts in the Thiruvithamkoor kingdom. Under overarching colonial domination, these were increasingly being cornered by non-Malayalee Brahmins. The natives of Thiruvithamkoor, sought to be represented by the Memorial were really the Nairs. Here one once again sees the deployment of the modern, in this case civic protest and national identity, leading to the recreation of the traditional. It was motivated and circumscribed by the outmoded, in this case relying on caste as criterion to determine socio-political role. Yet it was rendered through the political forms and symbols of modernity.

#### URGENT APPEAL

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

—Publisher, Editor, LAW CONTACT

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Both of these examples show why it is correct and necessary to register this social dynamic as Savarna democracy. Its Savarna character is of course quite visible. The dispute would be over whether it can be termed democratic in any sense, or whether it has contributed in any manner to democratisation. There are compelling arguments that vehemently deny these movements any claim on democracy. I disagree. The Savarna stream limited itself to reform of the Brahmanist social order and its values. But the movements it led and the discourses they gave rise to did go to open up space for democratisation. On its own, given its own Brahmanist fetters, it would never populate that space. That would need a challenge to Brahmanism. Yet the historical significance of the democratic openings made by this stream cannot be denied. It needs to be acknowledged in any meaningful account of democratisation in the society. Not just for history, this is relevant and necessary for the present too.

The Brahmin reform movement of the Prarthana Samaj and similar bodies in Maharashtra and the non-Brahmin movements of Jyotirao Phule and Dr BR Ambedkar in Maharashtra is an example of the Savarna, Avarna streams in another part of the country.

The Savarna stream of democratisation could present its reforms as a matter of individual and class demands against caste. But the Avarna stream could not but raise caste demands to satisfy similar needs. It had to first settle the matter of its caste exclusion. Equality of opportunity meant something different in this case. It had to be gained and legitimised primarily as a caste, not as individuals. Thus, the Avarna stream was forced to articulate its demands through the category of caste, something historically outmoded in the gaze of modernity. It

seemed to be stuck in the old rut. But, in fact, in our context, it was really addressing a task of genuine democratisation. Unlike this, the Savarna stream remained limited to reforms within the traditional caste order. The democratisation it strove for was superficial. Yet it could articulate its needs through the language of modernity. Apart from removing the obstacles of orthodoxy it had no quarrel with caste or Brahmanic rituals. Once that was done, the casteist values and practices that persisted in the Savarnas' social and private lives, could be 'disappeared'. They could enjoy the privilege of being Savarna, while presenting themselves as individuals, standing above or beyond caste. Thus the Savarna stream could appear as the standard bearer of modernity even while it continued to nurture the values of caste-feudalism, now as reformed Brahmanism.

The near total identification of the transition that took place in Bengali society with the responses of its Savarna bhadralok to colonialism is a striking example of this posturing. As is widely known, the ending of Sati is commonly hailed as a momentous episode in what is labelled Indian Renaissance. Yet critical studies have well demonstrated its social and spatial limits. Sati involved only a tiny section of Savarna women, that too from only a part of the Northern region. How then can it be considered as representative of that whole sex in the sub-continent? Moreover, the ending of Sati was accompanied with the making of the 'modern' Savarna women with new notions of propriety. This was then generalised as the model for 'Indian' women. In the process, the relatively liberal moral spaces enjoyed by Avarna, and even Shudra, women were eroded. So how exactly does this qualify as Renaissance?

What one sees here is an inversion. It was generated by the interac-

tion of the modern, brought by colonialism, with existent caste-feudal relations. Through this inversion, the sustenance of the traditional through its reform appeared as modern. Meanwhile, in the case of Avarna articulation, necessarily done in caste terms, the progressive appeared as outmoded. The real nature of social relations that shaped up under colonialism remains concealed. This false consciousness had tremendous influence in all aspects of society, particularly in the ideological realm.

Not the Savarna stream of democracy but the Avarna stream, with its roots going all the way back to the anti-Brahmanist Bhakti movements, must be drawn upon if people are to carry out any meaningful problematisation of democracy in Indian context.

However, a mere recall of those values and teachings will not suffice. They too had internalised the dialectic of transformation/resurrection seen in colonial modernity. In a caste-feudal society, to be true to its historical task, bourgeois democracy must engage with the task of annihilating caste, overturning the caste order. The merit of the movements mentioned above lies in their dealing with this task, unlike the Savarna stream with its formal symbols of modernity. Yet none of these movements could relate caste annihilation to the destruction of feudalism and imperialism, which determined and continue to over-determine socio-economic structures and values. Except for Vaikunta Swami, none of them identified colonial domination as an enemy or the nexus between the colonial power and Savarna royalty.

Bourgeois democracy inevitably fails when colonial domination itself protects caste-feudalism, even while transforming it. It cannot even identify the true nature or limits imposed by a modernisation taking place under colonial domination. This is because of its bourgeois class content.

Even when genuine bourgeois democracy in an oppressed country stands against feudalism and imperialism, the capitalist class essence it shares with the colonial oppressor prevents it from repeating, even in its thinking, the revolutionary thrust of a bourgeois renaissance. No doubt, the opportunities, endowments and hence capacities of the early 20th century movements were quite varied because of their positions in the class and caste order. But that does not deny the ultimately bourgeois limits of their views or its centrality in restricting their practical aims. In the case of Kerala, only Sahodaran Ayappan could come close to surpassing this, ideologically as well as practically, by pursuing rationalism, addressing the issues faced by the emerging modern working class and recognising the historical significance of the Russian revolution.

This was the immediate context of the budding working class movement in Kerala. Its historical roots lay in the Avarna stream. In fact, its first organiser Bava Mooppan was inspired by Narayana Guru and so were his recruits. How did the emerging communist movement synthesize this? The new class, the proletariat, generated by the combined exploitation of imperialism, caste-feudalism

and local capitalism could have overcome the drawbacks of the Avarna stream. Unlike other classes, this one alone had the living experience of all types of exploitation and oppression. This class had the capacity to take up Marxist ideology which would give an all around view of society, and link up all the streams of democratic and national awakening into a revolutionary assault on the old society. But that didn't happen. The communist party leadership that had to lead the proletariat in this task repeated the old story of partial vision and partial opposition, now wrapped up in Marxist terminology. And this was true all over India.

The continued existence of caste and other forms of social oppression and discrimination, the continuing domination of Brahmanic values in all aspects of society, despite the social ferment created by the movements of the past, invariably expose the limitations and failures of those movements themselves. What took place here was not a thoroughgoing renaissance but its faint shadow. This modernisation was by no means a capitalist one but an outcome of the partial transformation of caste-feudal society by imperialist colonialism. The re-reading of our past by Dalit, feminist, Adivasi activists and intel-

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

—Fr.

lectuals have yielded many new insights that question the pretensions of enlightenment, in Kerala and throughout the country. This is of immense help in carrying out the contemporary tasks of democratisation. Given the present situation these can only be fulfilled in close relation to resisting and defeating Brahminist Hinduvadi fascism in all spheres – political, social, cultural and economic. Dr. BR Ambedkar had astutely observed that “Brahmanism and capitalism are the two enemies of the workers.” One can safely amend that, without distortion, and state that they are the enemies of all the peoples of this country. Capitalism understood as imperialism and bureaucrat capitalism and Brahmanism understood not just as the ideology but also the remaining caste-feudal structures and values are surely the breeding ground of fascism in the country. □□□

*[Presented at the webinar under the auspices of the Vivekananda Chair, MG University, Kerala-October 22, 2022]*

## PRESS STATEMENT BY SAPACC

### Climate Crisis

*[South Asian People's Action on Climate Crisis [SAPACC] is a rainbow coalition of South Asian trade unions, farmer's & women's organisations, youth, fisher-folk, scientists, scientists, and people who are deeply concerned about the climate crisis. Following is a press statement issued by SAPACC on November 4, 2022]*

**G**REENHOUSE GASES (GHGs) have caused an observed average global warming of 1.1oC above pre-industrial temperatures. That anthropogenic emissions are causing global warming is known since 1896.

**Failure of the climate agreements**  
Intergovernmental agreements have failed. The Kyoto Protocol was to

reduce developed countries' emissions by 5.2% by 2012 over the base year 1990. Consumptive emissions of these countries instead increased by 14.5%. To meet the =1.50C warming ambition, current emissions must be halved by 2030-35, and the world should become net carbon zero by 2050-55. That implies that emissions must be reduced by >7% per annum

(pa) for the next 30 years. But emissions have been growing by 1.2% pa. Our current emissions trajectory will cause an unbearable global average warming closer to 3oC by 2100 that will have catastrophic consequences for the environment and human society. India and the world are witnessing accelerated impacts such as this year-at barely 0.8oC and 1.1oC average warming, respectively.

The low ambition of the largest GHG emitters, the odds at which climate science and policy are, and the failure of the market mechanisms, have together created an unenviable situation where we have 8

years left to halve our emissions. Instead of analysing the fundamental causes of climate change and its remedies, the 2021 Glasgow Conference of Parties (COP) 26 spent much time framing rules for the Paris Agreement's market instruments that are akin to the failed ones under the Kyoto Protocol. The primary discourse in the COP meetings has ignored the fundamental role that anthropocentrism and privatization of nature have played in history in sanctifying and encouraging unbridled growth that is at the root of social inequality and unsustainability.

#### **Winners and losers**

Developed countries with 16% of the global population today have consumed 69% of all fossil fuels expended since the industrial revolution began. Developing countries constitute 84% of the world's population today, but their consumption of fossil fuels was 31%.

Developing countries are in a Catch22 situation. If they burn more fossil fuels to "develop," they will contribute significantly to warming. If they control their emissions they will remain permanently backward in comparison to the developed countries. Even if the entire remaining carbon space is given to developing countries, they cannot achieve the material standards of developed countries.

#### **The extreme vulnerability of**

##### **South Asia**

South Asia is one of two regions that already is, and will be most affected by climate change. It has a quarter of the world's population but emitted only 3.6% of the global cumulative emissions. The primary risks to South Asia are:

**Sea level rise:** By 2100, about 20-25% of Bangladesh's land mass will be lost to sea level rise, creating 50 million Bangladeshi climate refugees by 2050. By 2100, Maldives, an archipelago of ~1,200 low-lying islands with a population of 500,000, will be under the sea.

**Water stress:** Snow and glacier melt contribute a significantly higher amount to the total discharge in the Indus (60%) and the Amu Darya (70%) in comparison to the Ganga and the Brahmaputra (9-21%). In a warming world, the discharge of the Indus, and the Amu Darya will decrease significantly, causing large parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan to become severely water-stressed and drought-stricken in a few decades.

**Glacial lake outburst floods:** As glaciers melt, the volume of water in glacial lakes below many Himalayan glaciers will increase and burst their moraine dams, causing GLOFs, whose impact will be felt for up to 150 km downstream. Villages, fields and everything else in a GLOF's path will be washed out. With climate change, the frequency of GLOF occurrence is expected to increase in the Himalayas.

**Extreme weather events:** South Asia saw extremely hot March-April months this year, with temperatures soaring 4-5°C above normal. South Asia also had very heavy precipitation that killed 3,700 persons in floods that occurred in almost all South Asian countries. A third of Pakistan was flooded in July-August, affecting 33 million people, killing >1,500 people, putting half a million people in relief camps and causing a property loss of \$40 billion.

India will be impacted by many types of climate change-related events—sea level rise, GLOFs, extreme weather events (abnormally high temperatures or precipitation), floods, drought, cyclones, significant crop yield losses, erratic rainfall, heat stress, etc. A large number of extreme weather events have occurred in India in the last 15 years, indicating that more of them are likely to happen in future.

#### **SAPACC's demands**

Considering the grave situation described above and the time for cor-

rection is very short, SAPACC calls upon the President of COP 27, the United Nations General Secretary, and all nations to declare a climate emergency immediately and consider implementing the following measures to move towards a sustainable, equitable and peaceful society:

- **Sustainability:** Developed nations must pledge to become net carbon negative in consumption emissions by 2030-35 to create space for developing nations to decarbonise by 2040-50. Decarbonisation must focus primarily on: a) Mitigation focussed on the reduction of consumption levels in the Global North, and supply-side management leaving >90% of the remaining fossil fuel reserves in the ground; b) Sequestration focussed on Nature Based Solutions that centre climate and social justice. In addition, decarbonization strategies must eschew failed, untested, hypothetical market-based solutions and techno-fixes. Through these means, gross global consumption should be reduced to sustainable levels, the measure for which should be a quantifiable justice-centric sustainability index.
- **Environmental justice:** a) Responsibility for loss & damage: Nations/regions should take responsibility for climate change impacts attributable to them—displacement, property loss, etc—in proportion to their cumulative emissions (emissions from 1750 to date); Developed countries should deliver promised climate finance in time; b) Sharing benefits and risks equally: All people of the world should share equally the wealth created by GHG emissions as well as the risks caused by them. Humans have no property rights over fossil fuels as it is nature that made them.



- **Equity:** The maximum/minimum ratio for income/energy consumption for all people in the world should be=5.
- **Environmental restitution:** Degraded land, water, air, and to the extent possible, biodiversity should be resti-tuted to their pre-industrial period quality.
- **Decentralization, democratic, transparent climate governance:** As people's involvement is essential for tackling the climate crisis, climate governance

should be decentralized and democratized, governance information should be in the public domain, and people's assemblies set up worldwide to allow people's voices to be heard and reflected in climate decisions. □□□

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#### AN UNPUBLISHED REPORT

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## Mahadev Desai on Communal Riots

*Ramachandra Guha*

**I**N APRIL 1941, COMMUNAL riots broke out in Ahmedabad. The violence raged for three whole days, during which many people were killed, many more injured, and hundreds of homes razed to the ground. Mosques and temples were also desecrated. What happened in Ahmedabad in 1941 was a product of a countrywide polarisation of religious communities. The Muslim League was growing in strength, challenging the Congress's claim to represent all Indians. Jinnah and the League had charged the Congress provincial governments that held office between 1937 and 1939 of following anti-Muslim policies. The Congress governments resigned when the Second World War broke out, but the polarisation persisted. In March 1940, the Muslim League passed its so-called 'Pakistan Resolution', demanding a separate nation for Muslims. On the other side, Hindu extremist groups such as the Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh were priming themselves for action.

The outbreak of rioting in a town he had once called home deeply distressed Gandhi. The Mahatma had lived in Ahmedabad from 1915 to 1930. However, in 1941, he was based in his new ashram in Sevagram, near the central Indian town of Wardha. He immediately dispatched his secretary and confidant, Mahadev Desai, a native Gujarati speaker, to Ahmedabad. Mahadev Desai spent several weeks in the town, talking to

a cross section of people. He wrote a long report on the riots, which remains unpublished. This report was recently discovered in the archives, and rehabilitated here, for it is both very moving and speaks directly to the communal situation in India today.

As a long-time follower of the Mahatma, Mahadev Desai was profoundly disturbed by the destruction of tombs, temples and mosques. He called them "acts of cowardly [and] cruel desecration". Mahadev wrote that "whatever the Mussalmans may have done – and they were, I am sure, instruments in the hands of conspirators who have set the ball of religious hate and destruction rolling in the land – I would, if it was in my power, perform penance by restoring the mosques and the tombs... It would surely pave the way for concord and mutual understanding."

In Mahadev Desai's opinion, "there could be no real communal unity without a mutual expression of contrition translated into concrete acts..."

He thought the lead should come from civil society. For, as he pointed out, the "Government is impotent to bring this [unity] about even as it proved itself impotent to check the acts of wanton destruction and brutality. The Muslim may do certain things with impunity today, and the Government may look on; from tomorrow if the Hindu acts likewise, it is quite likely that the Government will similarly look on." Rather than seek-

ing to stem or stop the violence, noted Mahadev, the government "would do anything to oblige themselves". The perpetuation of British rule rather than the nurturing of social harmony was the government's objective in 1941. Mahadev believed that "lasting peace can therefore come only through mutual understanding" between Hindus and Muslims.

Mahadev Desai turned next to what he called the "rehabilitation of the sense of citizenship". There would always be bad eggs in society; it would thus be "difficult to eliminate the goonda". Yet, the goonda, Gandhi's secretary pointed out, "does not act on his own. He has the support of the cowardly and the exploiting element in society". It was they who had employed the goonda; it was they who "engaged youngsters for the ignoble crimes of arson and murder". By using misguided or hot-headed young boys to promote violence, sectarians on both sides had, remarked Mahadev, "done them incalculable and irretrievable harm and poisoned citizenship at its fountain-source". Mahadev Desai then poignantly asked: "And why must the Hindu look upon the Mussalman as his enemy and vice versa? When the barriers between nations and races are breaking down – in spite of the infernal war in Europe – should there be unbreakable barriers between these two communities? Is it not possible to re-examine dispassionately the cases of both?"

For Mahadev Desai, as for Gandhi himself, political freedom had no meaning unless it was accompanied by Hindu-Muslim harmony. Gandhi and Desai had not abandoned their potentially lucrative legal careers; they

had not willingly spent such long periods in jail, to finally win a nation in theory independent but in practice riven by discord. In the quarter of a century he had been with Gandhi, Mahadev had never before felt so despondent. "The fight for Swaraj," he wrote now, "is long and arduous. But it has never looked so long and arduous as it does today." That said, it was not in Mahadev Desai's nature to give up. "Those who have dedicated themselves" to the fight for swaraj, he continued, "have to carry it on with faith in their mission and their principles". For, as he pointed out, "it is not the ideal or the principles that have been found wanting. It is we who have been found wanting. If we bestir ourselves and begin building anew, the communal strifes that we are having today will not have been lost upon us."

Mahadev Desai himself died a little more than a year after he wrote his report. Had he been alive in 1946 and 1947, he would have been with Gandhi, dousing the flames of communal strife in Bengal, Bihar and Delhi. While other Indians were found wanting, in these months and years, Gandhi worked heroically to rebuild bridges and restore trust between Hindus and Muslims. It was Gandhi's peace mission and martyrdom, along with the Nehru government's firm commitment not to wreak vengeance on Indian Muslims in return for Pakistan's persecution of Hindus and Sikhs, that allowed the new nation to leave behind the poisonous residues of

Partition and craft a democratic and plural political order.

The first decade-and-a-half of independent India was relatively free of religious strife. However, from the early 1960s, the country has been peppered with inter-religious violence, with large-scale episodes of rioting breaking out from time to time. Now, with the nation in its seventieth year, lasting communal peace remains elusive. Of the points that Mahadev Desai made in 1941, two in particular remain pertinent today. The first is that one cannot look to governments alone to maintain social peace. A few politicians and ministers seek to promote communal harmony; they are outnumbered by the politicians and ministers who create and profit from communal tension. Thus, while Nehru did strive to stop the persecution of minorities, the government led by his own grandson, Rajiv Gandhi, encouraged the pogrom against Sikhs in 1984. Likewise, in Maharashtra in 1992-93, in Gujarat in 2002, in UP in 2013 – to pick only three of many such cases – state governments have looked on and even abetted violence against Muslims. And in Kashmir in 1989-90, so-called 'freedom fighters' savagely purged the Pandits from the Valley.

The second and still depressingly relevant point made by Mahadev Desai back in 1941 has to do with the instrumental use of impressionable, dissatisfied, young men for narrow, and often hateful, political ends. There are many political organisations active

in India today which engage "youngsters for the ignoble crimes of arson and murder". They include Hindu fundamentalist groups, such as the Bajrang Dal and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, which are particularly influential in the north and west of the country; Islamic fundamentalist groups such as the Lashkar and the Hizbul, currently active in Kashmir; chauvinistic organisations such as the Shiv Sena and the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena; and Maoist revolutionaries in central and eastern India. These groups constitute what Mahadev called "the cowardly and the exploiting element in society" which, by mobilising men to their variously malign causes, do the youth of India "incalculable and irretrievable harm" and thus poison "citizenship at its fountain-source".

Mahadev Desai's report of 1941 was intended as a wake-up call to the Congress Party. Back then, the Congress might have had some credibility; now, seventy-six years later, it is corrupt and corroded beyond redemption. Nor can one expect a Central government run by Narendra Modi and Amit Shah to think and act on the lines of those other (and greater) Gujaratis, Gandhi and Mahadev Desai. It is for civil society organisations untainted by sectarian prejudice to take forward their ideas of tolerance, pluralism, mutual understanding and mutual respect to those Indians still willing to listen and to learn. □□□

[Courtesy: *The Telegraph*]

## LETTERS

### GM Mustard

The Supreme Court November 3, 2022 put a status quo on planting genetically modified (GM) mustard and conducting its trials and demonstrations in India.

The Supreme Court already had pending cases on the matter of genetically modified organisms (GMO) in general and GM mustard in par-

ticular that the activists had filed as public interest litigations.

The anti-GM group knocked the doors of the Supreme Court. They requested the court on November 2 to list the matter for November 3, which the SC granted.

Kavitha Kurunganti, an activist who has been at the forefront of anti-GM protests, said, "The SC heard

the matter and issued a status quo on the same. According to the directives, no seeds can be planted until November 10 when another hearing is scheduled."

Promod Gupta, Kolkata

### Enacting Climate Justice in India

Leading up to the COP27 meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, Indian climate activists and academics associ-

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ated with Climate Justice Network urge the Government of India to develop socially-just approaches to climate action and climate adaptation. This is crucial to protect the lives and livelihoods of the communities that are bearing the brunt of the climate crisis.

India's preparations for COP27 are focused on demanding that the industrially advanced countries pay a fair share of the investments needed for effective and speedy climate mitigation, and adaptation, and compensate for loss and damage that is already happening. India and other countries of the Global South are entitled to an equitable atmospheric space and to resources needed to cope with the climate crisis already underway. After all, the industrially advanced countries have contributed a vast majority to the accumulated stock of GHG responsible for the climate crisis. Despite minimal contribution to the root causes of the climate crisis, south Asian countries including India are on the frontlines of these extreme weather events. This begs the question of how the people of India respond to the ongoing impacts of the climate crisis at home.

The first national report on the state of the climate crisis called 'Assessment of Climate Change Over The Indian Region' revealed that India's average temperature increased by 0.7 degrees Celsius between 1901-2018. India is already also paying massive economic costs of climate breakdown. According to the Global climate risk index 2020, India suffered an absolute loss of \$37 billion due to climate change in 2018. A recent RBI study predicts that "a persistent increase in temperature in India in the absence of risk-mitigating policies can cause the per capita GDP to reduce by 6.4 percent by 2100". India has witnessed some of the worst extreme weather events; cyclones, floods, heatwaves, heavy rainfall, and drought. Moreover, in

many parts of India, we have already crossed the 'safe limits' of air, water, and soil pollution. All of this suggests that in addition to demanding international reparations, we will also need to act at home.

Investments in renewable energy and technology transfer should be geared toward facilitating a society-wide transition to renewable energy and the development of climate-resilient social and economic infrastructure. At the same time, any compensation for loss and damage should be used to address the vulnerability experienced by the most marginalised people within India. Dr. Prakash Kashwan, an Environmental Studies professor at Brandeis University and co-founder of Climate Justice Network, says that addressing climate vulnerabilities requires that in addition to strengthening the physical infrastructure, India will need to develop affordable and convenient public transport for all, strengthen public provision of potable water, significantly increase state support for agroecological farming, address the precarious living conditions for migrant workers who contribute to running our cities, and institutionalise social safeguards to protect the poor, especially Dalits, Muslims, and other marginalised groups. All of this work needs to be sensitive to deeply entrenched gender inequalities, Kashwan said.

As India fights for the rights of the poor countries to reparational justice and for adequate compensation for loss and damage, it is appropriate to ask the following questions:

1: How do the govt. of India and state governments plan to prepare for climate-related disasters, such as heat waves and floods that have become increasingly more frequent.

2: How does the government seek to protect the most marginalised, who are also most vulnerable to climate impacts and climate disasters?

3: Do government agencies main-

Note (It is a Shame) published in the issue Vol 55, No 18 [dated October 30-November 5, 2022] is by Rudra Sen, not Bharat Dogra as printed. Error is regretted. —Fr

tain data on internally displaced environmental and climate refugees that the media has reported on repeatedly?

4: What do governments plan to do about the longstanding crisis in agriculture, specifically, dryland agriculture, which the climate crisis is making worse?

5: What plans do government leaders have for a large number of people working in coal mining and other related formal and informal sector activities? Is the recent entry of the private sector in the mining sector conducive to ensuring a just transition away from coal?

6: What are the plans for addressing energy poverty among India's poorest people, which makes them more vulnerable to shocks of heat waves?

7: How do we plan to enhance urban resilience, especially considering that India is home to one of the fastest rates of urbanization?

8: How do we protect India's sanitation workforce, almost all of who are Dalits, against the hazardous working conditions they experience everyday, but especially in the aftermath of floods and other climate disasters?

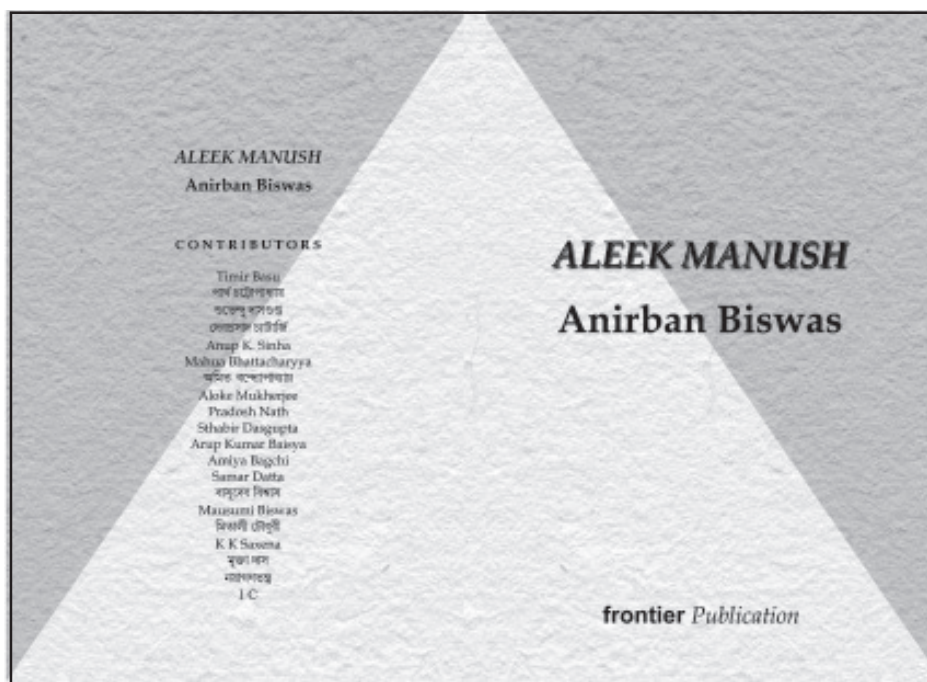
9: Has the govt. of India studied the impact of rapidly increasing economic inequality on climate vulnerability among India's poor and marginalized?

10: What policy framework do governments propose to engage India's vibrant civil society for socially-just approaches to climate mitigation and climate adaptation?

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