

# frontier

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Founder-Editor : **SAMAR SEN**

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Editor : **TIMIR BASU**Assistant Editor : **Subhasis Mukherjee**

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E-mail : frontierweekly@yahoo.co.in  
frontierweekly@hotmail.com

Telephone : 2530-0065

[Typeset by THE D-COMLASER, 60 Sikdar Bagan Street, Kolkata-4, Ph : 98361-58319]

## *Business as Usual*

**N**EARLY ONE HUNDRED HEADS OF STATE, 45,000 DELEGATES from 200 countries took part in the climate summit-COP27—and enjoyed the Egyptian hospitality without really hitting the target. They came to deliver lectures with no seriousness to address the problem that is going out of control with every passing day. Tomorrow may be too late. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres opened the all important meeting with warning that the world is “on the highway to climate hell—with our foot on the accelerator”. But for the world leaders, particularly big bosses from America and Europe, it was no more than business as usual.

The goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels which was set at the 2015 world climate conference in Paris has long since been abandoned. America's non-cooperation was the principal reason for its failure. The situation today is alarming.

The recent floods in South Asia, particularly in Pakistan and India, is a case in point. For Africa the scenario is bone-chilling. Disasters after disasters are occurring year after year and yet the global North ignores it; possibly they derive comfort from the fact that the crisis affects only the poor. Poor countries are victims of climate change for which they are not responsible in the first place.

How America in league with NATO has aggravated the climate crisis is hardly discussed in the mainstream media. The sanctions against Russian gas and oil have led to an explosion in energy prices throughout Europe and most third world countries. Forced into desperation many countries have decided to burn coal and other high emission energy sources again while shelving already adopted programmes to phase out coal. Poorer countries apart, even Germany is said to be reviving coal-fired thermal power plants.

They selected Sharmel-Sheik tourist resort, situated at the tip of the Sinai Peninsula for more than one reason. The Egyptian dictator Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, the host of COP 27, created a special zone for environment protesters, far removed from the public and under the watchful eyes of his high alert armed forces. Also, this place is hard to reach except by plane. So the big polluters were free from any 'nasty noise' by environment activists! Immediately before the conference began, some 150 people were arrested for political dissent in several Egyptian cities. Sisi who came to power in a bloody coup in 2013 rules Egypt with iron fist. Sixty-thousand political dissenters are behind bars in his regime, many of them on death row.

According to a new study by Oxfam, 125 billionaires and their investments are responsible for more green house emissions than countries such as France, Egypt or Argentina. The Russia-Ukraine war-induced energy crisis and abnormal hike in prices of fuel all over the world has its logical impact on economies, major or minor.

With inflation soaring world-wide more and more workers are now on the streets. Britain, Australia, China, South Korea and other industrially advanced countries were recently rocked by a series of strikes. Workers everywhere were demanding pay hike and protection of job from lay-offs. They are fighting against low wages and the rising cost of living. The last month has seen a bunch of big

technology companies, including Meta, Twitter, Lyft, Salesforce, Microsoft and Stripe announced lay-offs. The Silicon Valley is tightening its belt more than other industries.

In Germany people demonstrated against their government's military support to Ukraine which is increasing inflationary pressure. In Britain more than 40,000 rail workers will go on strike on December 13-14, 16-17, January 3-4 and 6-7. In China hundreds of workers joined protests at Foxconn's flagship iPhone plant in a massive factory in Zhengzhou city, with some men smashing surveillance cameras and windows, footage uploaded on social media showed.

Elsewhere unionised truckers in South Korea kicked off their second

major strike recently in less than six months, threatening to disrupt manufacturing and fuel supplies for industries from autos to petrochemicals in the world's 10th largest economy. And over in Australia Qantas Airways domestic cabin crew voted in favour of industrial action that could include work stoppages of up to 24 hours.

Maybe, this is the only positive gain of Russia-Ukraine war though at a heavy price. In truth only workers can force the authorities in America and Europe to reverse the dangerous consequences of climate crisis. If the Ukraine war continues further, the possibility of which looks real at the moment, global warming will worsen further, no matter whether they convene another climate conclave in another resort, not in the distant future. □

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## COMMENT

### Criminalising Parliamentary Politics

CRIMINALISATION OF INDIAN parliamentary politics is so deep-rooted that all parties hire goons during polls and field candidates with criminal charges. As per the Supreme Court order dated September 25, 2018, it is mandatory for all political parties to provide information regarding pending criminal cases against the contesting candidates, to the Election Commission. The all important information is also required to be published in a local and a national daily and up-loaded on official social media platform. But nobody bothers about the apex court's order. It has virtually no effect on the political parties in the selection of candidates. Election comes, election goes and it is the same old story of parading candidates with criminal records. In truth more and more people with criminal past are being elected to assemblies and parliament. The reasons given by the political parties to the Elec-

tion Commission as to why they select such candidates are anything but hilarious. They say they have no better alternative in the given situation. If anything this election business is all about how to loot the exchequer and it cannot go without violence and involvement of criminals. Vested interests matter.

Modi's home state Gujarat presents a unique scenario where dozens of candidates with criminal records from all parties are contesting in the first phase of ensuing assembly election. The number of candidates fielded by the Aam Admi Party (AAP) having criminal cases in different courts is 32 in the first phase of poll in Gujarat. In truth thirty percent of its candidates are facing serious charges such as murder, rape, assault, kidnapping among others as per a report of the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). This is the anatomy of Kejriwal-led AAP. And AAP is closely

followed by Congress which has fielded 35 percent of its candidates who have allegedly committed crimes. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is not far behind. It has selected a large number of candidates with criminal records. Percentage-wise such BJP candidates account for 16 percent of its total number while 12 percent are facing serious charges as the ADR report highlights. Strangely enough, the Bharatiya Tribal Party (BTP) which is contesting 14 seats in the first phase has four candidates (i.e. 29 percent) with declared criminal cases. What is more at least seven percent of its candidates have serious criminal cases this time. Of the 167 candidates from the first phase of Gujarat assembly election, 100 have declared serious cases against them in their affidavit submitted to the Election Commission. These include nine cases of crime against women, three cases of murder and 12 cases of attempt to murder. These men are called people's representatives; they are law-makers who decide the fate of millions. Law-breakers are

today persons in power. In the 2017 Gujarat assembly elections Congress, BJP and BTP had fielded 36, 25 and 67 percent candidates with criminal cases respectively in the first phase. The same tradition continues unabated. There is no difference between ruling parties and opposition parties---all utilise the service of 'crime syndicates' to win elections.

Poll-related violence is somewhat endemic in this biggest show-case of democracy. Pre-poll violence or post-poll violence, no election at the panchayet level or assembly level is free from violence. And in this area West Bengal leads the way. In Panchayet election in West Bengal in many places opposition parties are not simply allowed to file nominations. Even supporters of the opposition are terrorised and forced to leave their villages. The culture of violence mocks at the very spirit of

parliamentary democracy. As for rigging and false voting the less said the better--it is now part of the game called electoral politics. Muscle power had its role in elections in yester years but it is becoming an increasingly deciding factor in the outcome of election results.

Foot soldiers for election-oriented political campaigns are available in plenty in this land of massive unemployment. Even left parties see election as the only avenue in which they could engage their cadres round the year. And unfair means is not taboo to them. In the absence of mass mobilisation against corruption and injustice the persons in authority have succeeded in creating a situation of hopelessness which in turn gives birth to desperation among the youth.

Violence begets violence. And this vicious cycle of violence and counter-

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violence is unlikely to go away unless the oppressed raise their unified voice against the power brokers and dubious persons with criminal records, sitting in assemblies and parliament, as MLAs and MPs. □□□

26-11-2022

### NOTE

## Grazing and Conservation

*Bharat Dogra writes:*

**W**HILE CONSERVATION and protection of environments should get very high priority in development planning, avoidable problems have been created whenever conservation has been pushed into a narrow path where it gets alienated from the concerns and needs of local people and communities. One aspect of this narrow approach, promoted by elites who frequently dominate conservation groups, relates to strong opposition to any grazing activity in conserved areas, leading to avoidable conflict of conservation programmes with local farming and pastoral communities.

Several learned scholars, experienced activists and community leaders including women have been emphasising the need for alternative

approaches which integrate and involve local communities instead of alienating them. This approach is likely to get further support from a new study on grazing.

This study was conducted by the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, with the support of the Himachal Pradesh government, local authorities and the people of Kibber village in Spiti. The study was based on examining and comparing two kinds of plots and particularly their soil, one where grazing was avoided and one where grazing was allowed, over a period of about 16 years or so. The study found that soil carbon in the fenced plots fluctuated 30%-40% more than in the plots where animals were allowed to graze. The study concluded that grazing animals can have a significant

impact on the stability of soil carbon in grazing ecosystems.

While the findings of this study are important, this does not imply that temporary restrictions on grazing should be ruled out in all circumstances. The context in which any restriction on grazing is introduced is very important, the crucial difference being whether this is done in a way which involves the community for promoting sustainable livelihoods, or whether it harms/alienates communities by curbing their short-term as well as long-term livelihood prospects.

This debate has wider implications as livelihoods of several farming and pastoral communities have been threatened from time by time by saying that their grazing activities are harmful for environment. If it can be demonstrated that with some adjustments and self-discipline, grazing and grazing animals can be an integral part of sustainable development systems, even contributing to

climate change mitigation as well as adaptation, then the agenda of rural development as well as conservation can change in important ways, whereby conservation also becomes more people centered instead of alienating towards rural communities.

This understanding is important also in the context of the wider policies of the so-called white revolution and animal husbandry. While there has been a lot of emphasis on somehow increasing liquid milk and milk product availability to cities and elite consumers, the more basic tasks such as protection, regeneration and improvement of grazing lands and ecosystems have been

neglected, with the result that sustainability aspects are suffering and costs of purchased inputs go on increasing at a fast pace. Farm/dairy animals particularly cows are always healthier when they roam around and graze feely, happily in green pastures.

While this understanding is of course important in the context of India, it is perhaps even more important in the context of several other countries of global south particularly Africa. In many countries of Africa, it is the pastoral communities, including several nomadic communities, which have suffered the most due to arbitrary and unjust policies, first for a long time at the

hands of colonial rulers and then from neo-colonial business interests. This led to not just breakdown of sustainable livelihood systems which had made very rational and wise use of local resources for centuries, but in addition also to several conflict situations. If many parts of Africa are suffering from so much hunger and conflict today, then this is to a considerable part due to the disruption of pastoral people's livelihoods and the blockage, denial and destruction of their grazing routes, lands and facilities. □□□

*[The writer is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include Planet in Peril, A Day in 2071 and Protecting Earth for Children]*

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## THE ENEMY

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# Repackaging Golwalkar

*Subhas Gatade*

**T**HE SEARCH FOR ENEMIES of 'Mother India' has perhaps finally ended for the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). It is the 'ecosystem of Islamists, evangelists, cultural Marxists and global tech giants Google, Facebook and Twitter.' They are described as India's major challenge in modern times. A senior RSS functionary—who also coordinates work between RSS and its political wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)—shared his piece of mind about it at a conference organised by one of its affiliated organisations, with a Central Cabinet Minister in attendance.

As is obvious according to him breaking this ecosystem was key to India's rise as the world power. He was of the opinion that these forces have even formed an alliance so that 'nationalist thought' does not prosper. At a cursory glance Arun Kumar's weltanschauung (world view) may seem normal but if one digs deeper and also looks at the key position in

which he is placed today, one needs to look more closely to see what signal emanates from his ideas.

Whether these remarks—where need to target the so-called unholy alliance between academics, left activists and representatives of religious minorities is being emphasised to further 'nationalist thought' could be read as creating an ambience to target and stigmatise such sections, to unleash brute force against them.

Remember analysts have noted how '[a]s the rule of law recedes in India, a new majoritarian consensus has emerged' and 'the views and actions of those who control power in Narendra Modi's time are replacing the commonly held beliefs of BR Ambedkar's time and the Constitution'.

People are also noting the fact that how a murder committed by a psychopath partner in a live in relationship—a gory incident much in the news these days which involved brutal killing of his Hindu female partner by a Muslim youth—which de-

serves exemplary punishment, can be used to vitiate the whole atmosphere by the combined efforts of majoritarian formations, one sided reporting by mainstream channels and spreading of mischievous reports on social media.

No doubt in an increasingly vitiated ambience and polarised atmosphere where there is increasing normalisation of hate speeches targetting the religious and social minorities—where even the role of the law enforcing agencies itself is increasingly under scanner, where planned attempts are on even to deprive the religious minorities of their basic right to prayer or there are increasing calls for targetting of minorities and unleashing of violence against them from so-called 'Dharm Sansads' and there are increasing fears that India can be witness to 'genocide like situation' unless the executive steps in, any such talk about targetting of particular sections of people, communities supposedly to strengthen 'nationalist thought', from people close to the ruling dispensation does not augur well.

All those who keep a close watch on the activities of the various



Hindutva organisations and their affiliates and have knowledge of what their leaders have said, written from time to time can even tell you that Arun Kumar's diatribe against 'Islamists, evangelists, cultural marxists etc' clearly resonates with what Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar popularly known as Golwalkar Guruji—the second supremo of RSS—has written in his much debated book titled "Bunch of Thoughts".

This book is basically a collection of Golwalkar's thoughts expressed by him over a period of two decades and more. In this five hundred plus page book, under the head 'Internal Threats' Golwalkar clubs Muslims, Christians and Communists in three separate sections. (Page 177-201, Bunch of Thoughts, Golwalkar, Sahitya Sindhu Prakashan, 2000)

One can recall how this section on 'Internal Threats' starts:

"..[I]t has been the tragic lesson of the history of many a country in the world that the hostile elements within the country pose a far greater menace to national security those aggressors from outside. Unfortunately, this first lesson of national security has been the one thing which has been consistently ignored in our country ever since the British left this land". (Page 177, Bunch of Thoughts, Golwalkar, Sahitya Sindhu Prakashan, 2000)

The book has also made equally controversial statements, regarding constitution as well as affirmative action and which also denigrates the independence struggle and its heroic participants.

It is a different matter that there is an increasing discomfort within the RSS to peddle such ideas openly. The present day leadership understands it very well that for a new look RSS—suited for the present times—crude anti-human solutions offered by Golwalkar in his speeches

and writings, would prove costly and it is time that they modulate their utterances or present his thoughts in a sophisticated manner.

No doubt there is an essential disagreement between what Golwalkar said / wrote and what the present day Hindutva Brigade believes in.

Three years back the present Sangh Supremo Bhagwat talked of bringing out a new edition of this book because of these considerations. Of course, the explanation offered by him to bring out this new edition was least convincing:

"As far as Bunch of Thoughts goes, every statement carries a context of time and circumstance... his enduring thoughts are in a popular edition in which we have removed all remarks that have a temporary context and retained those that will endure for ages. You won't find the (Muslim-is-an-enemy) remark there".

According to an analyst it is similar to saying that a sanitised version of 'Mein Kampf' by Hitler is possible where direct references targeting Jews could be removed to present a more palatable, lovable Hitler.

What is worth underlining is that RSS's 'public distancing' from Golwalkar is not limited merely to this particular book. In fact, they have found that their second Supremo's public positions which he expressed in the book 'We or Our Nationhood Defined' have been so obnoxious that they even deny that he even wrote that book.

It is now history which states that the first of Golwalkar's theoretical contributions for the cause of Hindutva appeared in the form of a pamphlet called 'We or Our Nationhood Defined' (1938). It was so straightforward in its appreciation of the 'ethnic cleansing' of Jews undertaken by Hitler and such an un-

ashamed proponent of the submergence of 'foreign races' in the Hindu race that later day RSS leaders tried their best to create an impression that the said book was not written by Golwalkar but it was merely a translation of a book 'Rashtra Meemansa' by Babarao Savarkar.

It is a different matter that in his Preface to 'We or Our Nationhood Defined' dated March 22, 1939, Golwalkar himself described Rashtra Meemansa as 'one of my chief sources of inspiration and help.

The American scholar Jean A Curran who did a full length study on RSS in early fifties, in his sympathetic book, Militant Hinduism in Indian Politics: A Study of the RSS (1951) confirms that Golwalkar's 77-page book was written in 1938 when he was appointed RSS General Secretary by Hedgewar and he calls it as RSS's 'Bible'.

Looking at Golwalkar's controversial pronouncements from time to time on various issues of social-political concern and his transcending the 'calculated ambiguity' on many an occasion which is a hallmark of the organisation which he built, it is not surprising that he has always come under barrage of attack from all those people/groups/organisations who oppose/d the project of Hindutva on various grounds.

RSS has finally discovered that the best strategy in this situation is to 'disremember' Golwalkar in public and fully implement his 'essence' in practice.

The best way to move forward in this situation is to 'repackage Golwalkar's ideas' continuously so that they appear more palatable to the wider populace. □□□

**For Frontier Contact**

**DHYANBINDU**

COLLEGE SQUARE

A TALE OF GOKULPUR

## Land Acquisition and Women's Empowerment

Arup Majumder

[This papers aims to analyse an aspect of Marxist feminism and its practice or applicability in the families of Gokulpur village, West Midnapore district of West Bengal after the land acquisition. This paper shows how the economic turmoil forced women to come out of their domestic sphere breaking free from patriarchal dominance and got employed in wage work and changed the social and economic structure that men have been taking advantage of throughout ages otherwise.]

**W**OMEN EMPOWERMENT has changed the world. In the history of human liberation movement, empowerment of women has become a crucial foundation. Since the seventies due to its influence, the prevailing theories and trends about the society, men and women began to change radically around the globe. With the spreading of feminist theories a change has been noticed even in the realm of Sociology. Emphasising on the perspectives of women, analysis of issues have began that was not in the mainstream for a long period of time. Gradually a distinct genre of feminism in sociological thought has enacted in the world.

Feminism is a social ideology and movement that values gender equality. It aims at breaking the oppressive patriarchal structure, gender discrimination as well as seeks rights to women. It is also a united and conscious attempt to provide physical, social, cultural, economical, political, sexual, power, identity based rights to women.

Although there was a formal development of revolution in the Euro-American countries, the foundation of feminism was laid by women power and conscious effort even in this subcontinent just like the third world countries.

The Western White Feminism is developed in the writings by Mary Wollstonecraft, C Wright Mills, Friedrich Engels, Karl Marx, Simone de Beauvoir, Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, and the Women Rights Movement thereafter and later in

the fiery writings of Kate Millett, Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer.

But besides knowing the history of the movement it must be taken into account that the battle fought for women have never been well received by the larger society. Satirical comments, ridicules or even the cold attitude of the society could not stop them. They were inexorable. Thus they were brutally violated outside and inside the four walls.

About 30 years ago, a pig-iron manufacturing company named Tata Metaliks, acquired about 200 acres of land from Gokulpur, a small village in the Paschim Midnapore district of West Bengal (Majumder and Guha 2008). About 91 families have lost 0.5-6.0 acres of paddy cultivation land, which as a result altered their lifestyle. They were much inclined to non-agricultural occupation and had to leave their main agriculture related occupation. So, they have faced food insecurity in their household level. Prior to land

acquisition, they were dependent on the crops produced in their own lands but after that, people were seen to buy staplefood (paddy) from their local market (Majumder 2011).

On the other hand, the compensation money they had received in return of their lands, was vested in the marriage of the unmarried girls of the family who didn't even complete their secondary school education (Majumder 2016). As a result, the marriage at an early age has not only deflected the social, physical and mental condition of a girl but also increased the rate of girl dropout from school in the society.

Apart from these, several others socio-economic changes are found among the land losers than the non-land losers. One such instance is the disintegration of family. That is, the joint families of the land loser have been broken down rapidly and thus resulted into nuclear family in comparison to the non-land losers which subsequently resulted in the fragmentation of the remaining land (Majumder 2016). As a result the rate of production of crop has decreased.

Amidst everything, there developed a sense of consciousness among the women which has been observed in the land loser family. And the reason for this consciousness is the acquisition of their farm lands which resulted in a socio-economic crisis in their family. The women of those families have paved

Table 1: Working women engaged in domestic and extra domestic work among the land loser families

Periods	Domestic and extra-domestic work						Grand Total
	Domestic	Extra-domestic				Total (extra-domestic)	
		Vegetable selling	Agricultural labourer with Vegetable selling	Day labourer	Others		
Pre-acquisition	113 (88.97)	8 (6.29)	2 (1.57)	1 (0.78)	3 (2.36)	14 (11.03)	127
Post-Acquisition	83 (49.70)	39 (23.35)	33 (19.76)	7(4.19)	5 (2.99)	94 (50.30)	161

Figures in parentheses represent percentages of row total

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the way for their social, cultural and political rights with the help of the male members of the family. The married women of Gokulpur village of Paschim Midnapore, West Bengal engaged themselves in various non-agricultural outdoor works because of the economic downturn after land acquisition.

In the Table-1, there is an attempt to quantify the work participation of women within and outside the domestic domain under the impact of land acquisition. The table shows that even before the acquisition some of the women (11.03%) were already doing extra-domestic work to provide economic support to their families but the percentage of women doing extra-domestic work was nearly up to 50% of the total number of women after the acquisition. The table also shows that vegetable selling in the market became an important extra-domestic job for women of the land loser families. Some of the women were also found to engage in both vegetable selling and daily agricultural work to earn money.

So, the table clearly shows prior to land acquisition the women were only in charge household chores but after this, they stepped out from their houses, and started working outside to maintain the stability of family. A comparative study between these factors and the sudden rise of women consciousness will ensure that the women of these families were established as social beings, subdued under the patriarchal system. But the family has easily accepted them when they started to work outside to protect the family from financial trouble.

However, a typical case study of one housewife of a land loser family who is now engaged in extra-domestic work is given below to depict the condition of women under the impact of land acquisition.

Archana Ghosh (Age 53 years) is a Sadgope housewife who provided a helping hand to her husband in

vegetable farming in the homestead land of their family. After two months of her marriage, her father-in-laws lost 3 acres of land. At that time there were seven members in the household. After acquisition they had only 0.5 acre of agricultural land, which was not at all sufficient to feed the whole family. She was advised by her husband to work outside the home to earn money. But being a newly married bride she could not do it. During that time her mother-in-law started to sell vegetables that they grew in their homestead land. But in the course of time she, along with her three sisters-in-law also started to sell vegetables in the Kharida Bajar, near Kharagpur town. At present she lives in a separate household with her husband and two children. Her elder son had to leave school two years ago and she laments for this tragic event. She also felt bad since she did not get any chance to look after her son and daughter properly because she has to spend considerable time outside her house to earn money for the family.

Thus all the social and political restrictions on women have been wiped off. If we take a closer look on the Western History, we can see that Mary Astell's 'Some Reflections Upon Marriage' in 1700 is the first written reflection of women's consciousness. The first organised form of revolution happened in the year 1840 because of two reasons, to demand the right to vote for women and to establish gender equality. Finally they regained their civil right after a long and blood shaded struggle in Britain on 1918 and in America on 1920.

The main reason for presenting these issues about the women of the Sodgope family was that the women could easily go outside and work without any opposition by the family members, which was quite unusual as they were strictly not allowed work outside.

Therefore it can be said that that

the women had achieved financial independence for the economic development of the family without any alleged revolution. Here, a similarity can be observed with liberal feminism because liberal feminists believed that the overall progress of women will be completed by reforming the social system. They were also of the belief that apart from their family life, women should actively participate in public as well as professional fields to remove the barriers in their way. A similar picture can be seen in the land loser families after land acquisition where the women could easily join in social life and other activities.

On the other hand, in Marxist Feminism one can see that the united pressure of Patriarchy and Capitalism in both homely and economical sect exploits women who end up making surplus value than them.

Moreover patriarchy, by emphasising the basic gender difference makes free wage work and parenting based on the comparison of the outside work market, declares these to be inclusive household responsibility for women and therefore this ideology is supported by Capitalism. Similar picture is also seen in the peasant's family of Gokulpur Village before the land acquisition.

For one thing the economic turmoil after the incident reduced the patriarchal dominance and forced them to be employed in wage work. According to Marxist Socialist critics, the unpaid service and loyalty by women was an advantage for the men. Also as women devoted themselves in domestic chores, there was no competition in the job world, which proved another advantage for the men. But the scenario changed after land acquisition where both engaged themselves in outside works. A definite path of women's consciousness can be observed in that particular social structure.

This land acquisition silently created a social norm and gender equality which apparently is a good as-

pect of feminism. In other words, it is clear from the above analysis that any kind of economic recession reduces gender equality in the society. □

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#### CHANGING INTERNATIONAL REALITY

## 21st Century is the Asia-Pacific Century

*Farooque Chowdhury*

**T**HE AMERICAN EMPIRE IS going to face competition in the Asia-Pacific. It was unimaginable to the hawkers of Unipolar World years ago. The competition will be tougher.

To the Empire, the Asia-Pacific was its own yard, a self-sphere for manoeuvring, for forward positioning to counter then Soviet Union and China, for dominance, for exploitation of resources and labour. The region's all economic potentialities were within easy reach of the Empire. That was the reality. This reality will perpetuate—that was the Empire's imagination.

But the planet has circled the sun many times, and basis for that imperial imagination is drying down. The Empire, now, hears different sounds in the region. All are not as obedient as the Empire expects, as the Empire's capacity is weakening.

Xi Jinping, the President of China, has echoed the changing reality: the Asia-Pacific is no one's backyard.

To the Empire, this statement sounds strange. But this is today's reality. This region is none's yard, neither backyard nor front yard.

For years, the Empire was eyeing the Asia-Pacific to turn it into its new ground for military power play. That's a requirement of the Empire. Its economy needs this region. Its war industry's need it's.

Since the defeat in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, the Empire was in urgency for its greater military presence in the region. Its so-called War on Terror diverted it attention and

resources to other regions. The region it considers as its backyard—the Latin America—was having developments annoying to the Empire. But it was failing to ignore the importance of the Asia-Pacific in its global dominance design. Since Obama's time, the Asia-Pacific was pronounced pivotal to its design, therefore.

Initiatives were taken. Changes in administration in the Empire found no change in the geostrategy related to the region. Those are being pursued now with extra-vigour.

This imperial action now faces an emerging reality as Xi announces: 'The Asia-Pacific should not become an arena for a big power contest. No attempt to wage a new cold war will ever be allowed by the power or by our times'.

The Chinese leader, with a mild tone, just reiterated the reality, nothing more: "The 21st century is the Asia-Pacific century. We, members of this region, have come a long way in pursuing economic development, and we will surely write an even more brilliant chapter in the years ahead."

It's, a more brilliant chapter, a reiteration of aspiration of the region.

Who wants war? None, other than the imperialists require war. War is a postulate to imperialist economy. Its source and character necessitates war. Imperialist economy can't survive without endless-expansion; and to have an expansion-ever, imperialist economy incites, provokes and fuels war, organises war-like situation and war-games; thus, pumps life to its heart—a well-known fact. Now, the Empire is engaged with such old, well-known steps.

Contrarily, Xi, in his statement made on November 17 at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) CEO summit in Bangkok, presented a six-point proposal:

- [1] Bolster foundation for peaceful development.
  - [2] Take people-centered development approach.
  - [3] Pursue greater openness.
  - [4] Strive for higher standard of connectivity.
  - [5] Build stable and unimpeded industrial and supply chains.
  - [6] Promote economic development.
- This programme hardly feeds the war industry imperialism relishes. On the opposite, the war industry loses niches with these.

Xi's statement cautioned by stating an aspect of today's economic condition in the region: The industrial and supply chains in the region required years of endeavours; and disruptions will send these to a cul de sac.

Xi proposed cooperation on development and security in the region. He rejected attempts by interested parties to initiate an Asia-Pacific version of Cold War.

The existing reality in the region, in the empire, and in the Empire-led camp carries elements of initiating Cold War Asia-Pacific version. This is evident in acts of provocation that began with that Pelosi-Taiwan move, and followed by a number of similar moves in Taiwan, and in other areas.

This reality of provocation, inciting tension, initiating arms race led the Chinese leader to say: 'The Asia-Pacific shouldn't be turned into an arena of big power rivalry. No attempt to organise a new Cold War will be allowed by the people and by our time'.

Xi's statement signals against



dominance, as he said: Unilateralism and protectionism, attempts to politicise and weaponise economic and trade relations should be rejected by all.

It appears absurd that proponents of free trade and free flow of capital are resorting to protectionism. The party is unilaterally determining rules of business. Then, it's demanding all should go by rules—Rules-based International Order—although it was not determined who defined which rule. It was not also determined who authorised who to define rule.

This unilateral way of defining rules is impossible to accept not only by China, but by all, as the ruler, the power unilaterally defining rule, may at its convenient moment determine that certain trade regimes, and economic and political measures aren't rule-based; and, then, it can unilaterally resort to counter-measures.

Already China has strong trade relations with many countries in the region. It has an increasing trend. China is Japan's largest trading partner, and Japan is China's fourth largest trading partner. South Korea-China trade is not negligible. In 2021, South Korea's trade volume with China was near equal to the country's trade with Japan, EU and US. China is the biggest trading partner of almost all ASEAN countries. Detail picture of trade relations between China and countries in the Asia-Pacific carries significant mean-

ing. In this area—trade, the Empire is yet to gain powerful position—a lack of competitiveness from the empire's end. The source of this weakness is within the Empire.

So, the Empire resorts to all sorts of measures and tricks required to stop China's trade-journey. Along with these measures, there're military moves.

What shall happen if the situation turns confrontational, if the existing environment of increasing trade relations is curtailed? Today's war-hit Europe stands as a living answer to the question.

Do capitals engaged with these trade and other economic activities in this region prefer a confrontational atmosphere? Shall that atmosphere contribute to furthering interests of those capitals? Today's war-charged Europe stands as an answer to the question.

Essentially, a competition between China and the US is going on in this region. Today, the competition is in the area of trade; tomorrow, it'll be politics and arms and war.

To capitals in the region today, the most important question is: Which side, China or the US, can deliver more opportunity, bigger gain, more profit? In a number of areas, the Empire is losing ground.

This makes the Empire more aggressive, more war-oriented and more reckless. Additionally, in a charged situation, in war-like situation, the war industry benefits. The

war industry needs fodder.

It's, therefore, found: The Empire is increasingly engaged with issues of [1] the South China Sea, [2] Freedom of navigation, [3] Taiwan and the Taiwan Straits, [4] deployment of war ships, [5] organising military alliances and military exercises. Even, attempts are being made to drag NATO into this region. Hillary Clinton, once US secretary of state, identified this region as an area of US national interest! The Empire's national interest is strewn out the world over! All should believe this assertion!

Now, it's the choice of capitals in the countries in the region with 50% of the world economic output, one of the fastest growing regions in the world—which side to be preferred. This preference will be made on the basis of gains by the capitals, gains from competing sides. A charged situation narrows down this scope of choice. Today's sanction-wielding EU, now turned into an arm of NATO, and is also an evidence on this question.

At the same time, this atmosphere of competition between capitals is going to impact peoples in countries—their livelihood, and their struggle for democracy. It's the pro-people political forces' choice—Whether or not to oppose imperialist design, war alliance, warmongering, economic regime being imposed. □□□

[Farooque Chowdhury writes from Dhaka, Bangladesh.]

## PAKISTAN TODAY

# Assassination Time Again

*Tariq Ali*

**A** FAILED ATTEMPT IN WAZIRABAD to assassinate the former Prime Minister, Imran Khan, has resulted in mass demonstrations throughout the country. Khan was aboard his campaign truck, on the long march of his supporters to Islamabad to demand immediate elections. Bullets hit him in the leg.

Was it two or three? Such is the focus of debate on Pakistani television. A dozen others were injured, while a father trying to protect his three children was killed. The dialectic of illegally or constitutionally toppled leaders retaining their popularity makes the Army extremely nervous. Technically, the coup against

Khan was legal: he lost a vote of no-confidence in April. The chicanery behind the scenes will come to light one of these days. Khan himself had few doubts that US pressure was behind his removal. The US State Department strongly denied any involvement, though did not hide its irritation at Khan's criticism of the 'mess' created in Afghanistan, nor at Pakistan's abstention on the UN vote for sanctions against Russia (the new government similarly abstained in the latest Ukraine vote).

A delegation of the ISI-Pakistan's intelligence service—who were visiting the Pentagon at the time of Khan's comments, reassured their friends that the country's foreign and defence policies were decided by the Army, not the Prime Minister. This is, of course, true and has been the case since General Zia-ul-Haq declared martial law and removed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1977. Zia promised elections within ninety days of the coup. In that case, suggested Bhutto, who had been placed under house arrest, all political leaders should be allowed to campaign publicly. The Army agreed and Bhutto went on a public tour, during which he was welcomed by huge crowds (a quarter of a million in Lahore alone). The general panicked. Were Bhutto to be re-elected, he would punish the coup-makers. A plot was therefore manufactured to charge him with murder and get rid of him. After a rigged trial, Bhutto was hanged in 1979.

A few months ago, this writer was reminded of these scenes from Pakistan's past. Khan's Party for Justice (PTI) is very different from Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in social composition and

political programme, but the dialectic is similar. Khan's removal led to large-scale demonstrations – his supporters chanting Jo Amrika ka yar hai, Ghaddar hai, Ghaddar hai ('Anyone a friend of America is a traitor, a traitor') – and the PTI went on to win a string of by-elections against the new government, in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Karachi city. Khan's popularity could not be doubted, but his demand for new national elections was refused. Ironically, the unelected new Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif, was advised by his brother Nawaz Sharif (a former PM himself) not to form a new government, given the state of the country, and instead call an election. But the younger brother was desperate for power. The Army backed him, believing that they needed a new government in place for a year or so to destroy the PTI (who they had helped to power in the first place, in the hope that Khan would be a tame politician).

Khan and the PTI are now accusing Sharif, the interior minister and a senior general of being involved in the shooting. The would-be-assassin has claimed that he acted on his own because he was disappointed by politicians and their broken promises. He's not alone in this regard, but shooting at them won't change all that much. A corrupt and violent elite linked to all political parties and the Army will not disappear overnight. The ruling classes in the country have done virtually nothing to help the poor. Whether the man who fired the bullets is working for more sinister forces (something many in the country believe) people do not know. Was it a shot across the bows to frighten Khan away from politics? If so, it has had the opposite effect. The shooter claims he got the idea when he heard the call to prayer earlier that day.

Interestingly, the word assassin is of medieval Islamic origin. It derives from the hashashin, drugged-up kill-

ers belonging to a Shia sect created by Hassan-i-Sabbah in 1090. Peaceful hippies they were not. They were professionals hired out to anyone who needed them for financial or political purposes. Dissolved in the 13th century, their ghosts seemed to have entered Pakistan soon after the country was formed. The first Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan was assassinated at a political rally in 1951. The killer, Said Akbar, was shot dead immediately by veteran policeman Najaf Khan, who happened to be standing right behind him. A coincidence, the police said. The result of his death was a weakening of the refugee presence in the government and founding party, and the rise of the Punjabi landlords as the key players in the country. Bhutto was hanged; his daughter Benazir Bhutto was assassinated (also in Rawalpindi). Prior to that, her brother Murtaza Bhutto had been ambushed and killed outside his house in Karachi in extremely murky circumstances – some blamed Asif Zardari (Benazir's husband and widower, later Prime Minister).

And now an attempt to kill Khan. Will it change anything? The masses are cynical, the politicians and generals busy making money. There is no national alternative in sight. The Pashtun Protection Movement is the only serious group resisting the crushing hegemony of the ISI. Its MPs and activists are often arrested and tortured. The PTI's collaboration on this front discredited it greatly. As did its total failure to deal with corruption outside and inside its own ranks. It would be good if some lessons were learned, and the next elections were more than two power-hungry blocs fighting to increase their bank-balances. □□□

[Tariq Ali is a Pakistan-born British political activist, writer, journalist, historian, filmmaker, and public intellectual. Courtesy: Sidecar, the New Left Review blog. Sidecar aims to provide a space on the left for international interventions and debate. New Left Review is a British bimonthly journal of ideas covering world politics, economy, and culture, which was established in 1960]

গড্ডালিকা প্রবাহ থেকে

বাংলা ভাষা তথা মাতৃভাষা বাঁচান

‘শুধু পূর্বাশা’

সাড়া জাগানো বাংলা পাক্ষিক পত্রিকা

ও ‘পূর্বাশা এখন’ মাসিক পত্রিকা

এখনই সংগ্রহ করুন

সব স্টলে পাওয়া যাচ্ছে। ‘শুধু পূর্বাশা’ দাম ৫

টাকা মাত্র ও ‘পূর্বাশা এখন’ ২৫ টাকা মাত্র।

‘শুধু পূর্বাশা’-এর বার্ষিক গ্রাহক চাঁদা ১৭০

টাকা। ‘পূর্বাশা এখন’-এর গ্রাহকরা অতিরিক্ত

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## CONFLATED DUALISMS

## How Ambedkar was both 'Dalitised' and 'Brahminised'

*Suraj Milind Yengde*

**A**MBEDKAR'S LEGACY IS complex and multifaceted. His is a name that continues to evoke dialogue and discontentment in sociopolitical movements formed in post-independent India. Yet, at the same time, Ambedkar has been intentionally ignored and strategically suppressed by history and society at large. Initially, many social and political movements did not embrace him. After the formidable resilience of his believers, who kept his memory alive and his struggle relevant, other mainstream movements piggybacked on their work, changing tracks when it directly benefited their interests. However, to condense Ambedkar's breadth of scholarship, he became a prolific face for the denouncers to uphold. It was an amenable strategy to either ignore and let die Ambedkar's scholarship or assimilate and grow. The latter was an obvious and relatively easy option to take. Political organisations with ideological underpinnings chose to select Ambedkar rather than accept him. The assimilation was a carefully crafted strategy to Brahminise and Dalitise Ambedkar.

Ambedkar was Brahminised by being made a part of India's greatness and presented as an exemplary patriot. And he was Dalitised at the same time to ensure that his place as an untouchable remained in the archive of Indian history, while he received no further credit. In either case, it was the intention of the ruling classes to control the narrative and own the history. Brahminising and Dalitising form a space of conflated dualisms. They are separated by the logic of history and yet they are one. The 'one'—a unison

of neglected human fallacies that become an absolute logic of interpretation of the other from the fragile ground of the oppressor. The juxtaposition of possibilities and pain affixed alongside each other makes it a mandate of the people.

The two extreme possibilities of human status—one on the highest while the other is left excluded. Accretions of unmasked merits define the final destiny of every human stretched in the rigid caste sphere.

If there is any figure from India's modern history who is present, alive and relevant, it is B R Ambedkar. No other historical figure has been resurrected so strongly as him. His colossal scholarship, along with his radical social and political interventions, have made him a deified rector of India's political school. His public life begins during his post-matric facilitation by the local slum dwellers that recognised his achievement. In 1919, aged twenty-eight, his first testimonial to the Southborough Commission argued for the franchise rights of all, irrespective of status or class.

Ambedkar's oeuvre continues to expand as more literature produced by him and on him hits the bookshelves every year. The pile of scholarship crediting to Ambedkar's work in non-English languages represents the largest import of Dalit cultural production. Books on Ambedkar are sold in crores over two days commemorating Ambedkar's death anniversary at Chaityabhoomi, Mumbai, or in Nagpur commemorating the day of mass conversion to Buddhism led by Ambedkar. These bookstalls occupy an important place in the make-up of Ambedkarite gatherings.

The recent upsurge in the number of attacks on the people's constitutional rights since the Modi government's tenure from 2014 has suddenly put Ambedkar back into everyone's view. Protesters took the assault of the state on constitutional liberty as a sign of impending fascism.

The protest against the current government and other Brahminical forces could be possible while upholding the constitutional virtues scripted by Ambedkar. Thus, the inevitability of Ambedkar and his political pragmatism became a weapon for the struggling masses of the country. Every ideology acknowledged Ambedkar and embraced his uncompromising radical-humanist vision. Ambedkar is difficult to fit into canon of non-Dalit ideologies. He does not parley without putting the rights of untouchables at the centre of nationalist or civil and political rights struggles. By appropriating and iconising him in the pantheons of the Hindu right and making him a nationalist figure fighting on the side of the Hindus, the current government took the offensive against every dissenter. The Shaheen Bagh protest of 2020 partly re-appropriated Ambedkar through its symbols and literature and through the act of carrying his photographs with a collective call of 'Jai Bhim', reclaiming his constitutional legacy to rescue him from the misappropriation of the Modi government.

Despite being a deft pragmatist and a non-dogmatic democratic socialist, Ambedkar has become the most celebrated figure across the political spectrum in India in contemporary times. Everyone tends to display their admiration for his intellect but have a reserved appraisal of his political work. Therefore, to downplay his complicated and at times controversial vista, it is safe for the non-Dalit sphere to present Ambedkar as a sworn constitutionalist. Earlier, the caste-hegemonic discourse of India refused to grant

the pedigree of India's Constitution to Ambedkar's scholarly toil. In some instances, it actively worked to denounce elements of Ambedkar's influence and politics. Arun Shourie, a liberal right-winger, is a case in point. His book *Worshipping False Gods* became a bone of contention over the authorship of India's Constitution and calling out Ambedkar for being in conversation with the British government and thus a collaborator of the Raj. The same was done by the dominant caste Hindu, Muslim, Sikh leaders of the Congress, however, they do not receive similar treatment as Ambedkar. Ironically, they are revered as nationalists. Many commentators who replied to Shourie's book commented that Ambedkar was now being 'elevated to the pantheon of nation leaders'. This means it was still unacceptable for the liberal and other non-Dalit spheres to accept him as a national figure towards the end of past century.

There are a few complicated hurdles. One is the adherence to Ambedkar as an individual with his merits and limitations. Another is to

deify him and to stop investment in critical thinking around his passionately curated oeuvre. Ambedkar and Ambedkarism are epochal.

The one who believes in Ambedkar as an individual and in his artistry of uniting a huge, segregated mass under one banner and making them a political missile identifies with Ambedkarite-ness. So does the one who takes Ambedkarism as an eventual philosophy to develop progressive and broader hermeneutics in the construction of a thematic approach to problems. These thematic approaches rely on issue-based politics with a strong undercurrent of inaugurating an anti-caste politics towards the annihilation of caste dialectics.

Ambedkar is the most mesmerising anti-Brahminical weapon, and no other community could produce another like him. His forthrightness in calling out the callousness of Brahminical elements woven in the Indian republic was astounding. His work takes shape in many forms. Aside from writing the destiny of his people, Ambedkar was also fighting to get their rights in

place. For this, he chose every option available. He started off as a rights advocate in a social movement, later went on to petitioning the government as a lawyer and people's leader, then toyed with the idea of claiming power through mass struggle and culminated in the political apparatus bargaining for more powers. After him, Dalit politics was open to be exploited. Many political parties, from the Congress to the socialists, tried to own his legacy by promoting Scheduled Caste leadership that was not entirely attuned to his radical programmes such as a separate electorate, separate settlement and nationalisation of important sectors—land and industry being the most prominent. A firm believer in socialism, Ambedkar saw State socialism as 'essential to the rapid industrialisation of India'.

He was confident of the incapacity of private capitalism to do this, and he observed that it would produce inequalities of wealth like it did in Europe. Ambedkar hoped to find amenable solutions to the problems the country faced. □□□

[Courtesy: *The Print*]

## A PRO-RUSSIAN LEFT?

### Leftist Response to Russia-Ukraine Conflict

*Sumanta Banerjee*

**W**HILE THE WAR RAGES ON in Ukraine, how is the Left facing the multi-dimensional complex challenges thrown up by the war and the ravages that it is heaping upon its people? The writer Arundhati Roy, in a lighter vein has summed up the Left's dilemma as "tortuous yoga asanas—some pretty drastic seeing and unseeing—depending on where you have decided to place yourself." She added: "Many on the Left cannot find it in themselves to call out Russia's invasion of the Ukraine. They believe that Ukrainian outrage against Russia has been entirely confected and cultivated by Western imperialism." (Re: Stuart Hall Memorial Lecture, September 30, 2022).

The well-known political commentator Achin Vanayik, in a recently published article, has come out with an interesting analysis of the international Leftist response to the war in Ukraine, where he puts the Leftists into four categories. The first group whole-heartedly supports the Russian invasion. The second, while condemning the Russian invasion, generally avoids reference to Ukraine's 'right to self-determination.' The third group urges for immediate peace and end to militarism. The fourth group speaks on behalf of the Ukrainian Left, and Achin Vanayik gives voice to their position in the following words: "We are as much against the US and NATO. But this war is not about Russian security concerns but primarily about its

imperialist ambitions. We are fighting this war; we need political, moral, material support and yes a continual supply of weapons, to enable us to effectively resist this military onslaught." (Re: Achin Vanayik 'Ukraine: Divisions among the Left' in *The Radical*, No. 1; October, 2022.)

As for the responses of Indian Left to the Ukraine war, one finds that their statements often sound ambivalent—hovering between a rather grudging condemnation of the Russian invasion on the one hand, and mainly blaming the US for the war on the other.

Soon after the Russian invasion, the CPI(ML) Liberation group came out with a statement, saying that it was "deeply concerned at the Russian display of military aggression at the borders of Ukraine," but at the same time condemned the "ongoing warmongering over Ukraine by the US and UK governments." It demanded that "NATO must halt its eastward expansion."



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At around the same time, the CPI(M) in a statement dated February 25, expressed its “grave concern at the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine. It is unfortunate that Russia took military action against Ukraine. There should be an immediate cessation of armed hostilities and the establishment of peace.”

Sometime later, on March 1, the CPI National Secretariat denounced Russian military action in Ukraine and said further advance of the Russian forces must stop and immediate ceasefire declared.

On March 2, 2022, the CPI(Maoist)—a banned party—issued a statement through its spokesperson Abhay, saying: “Russia should stop the war against Ukraine and withdraw its armies from the eastern part of Ukraine... Ukraine should not be made a part of NATO. All areas must be demilitarised.”

Most of these statements by the Indian Left usually echo the same attitude expressed by the various sections of the European Left on the war in Ukraine. They blame it on NATO’s expansionist designs on the borders of Russia. They argue that because of this, a besieged Russia was forced to protect its borders by invading Ukraine. In this Leftist argument, they actually propagate a rather sneaking tendency in favour of Russia—depicting it as a victim of NATO’s expansionist designs.

The facts at the ground level however reveal that Russia annexed Crimea and invaded Ukraine, not as if it was facing any immediate military assault on its own territory by NATO. Till now, there is no such evidence in the public domain. In the absence of such proof, we are left with the conclusion that the Russian invasion of Ukraine stemmed from Putin’s aggressive impulse to extend the borders of the Russian territory. Given these circumstances, we have every right to suspect that Putin’s ‘military operation’ in Ukraine, is yet another manifestation of his policy of territorial expansion.

The Indian Left parties, while ignoring these ground level facts, also refuse to condemn the daily killing of thousands of Ukrainian citizens and destruction of their homes by the indiscriminate bombing and missile attacks by Russia. Instead, they come out with mealy-mouthed expressions like “deeply con-

cerned,” or “grave concern,” or request for “the establishment of peace.”

The Indian Left is indulging in a half-hearted criticism of Russian invasion of Ukraine, and is reluctant to condemn Russian atrocities in Ukraine which amount to war crimes that recall US war crimes in Vietnam and other parts of the world all through the last decades.

This Leftist ambivalence towards Russia can be traced to their lingering allegiance to memories of a socialist system which they identified with that country at one time. Yet, despite achievements in removing poverty and equitable distribution of resources, the record of that Soviet system of socialism under Stalin was besmirched by suppression of political dissent and violation of human rights. No wonder that the same Stalinist model of suppression is being followed today in Russia by Putin. He was trained by the KGB—the notorious intelligence and surveillance agency that was shaped by Stalin.

Some sections of the Indian Left while rightly acknowledging the socialist achievements of the Soviet Union, turn a blind eye to its dark side—the days of Stalinist despotic terror (that prevailed in Russia and Eastern Europe for almost half a century). They feel uncomfortable when reminded of that despicable record of atrocities. Similarly, in the case of China, some Leftist sections rightly again praise Mao’s success in eradicating poverty and lifting China as a powerful Communist state in the global arena, but at the same time fight shy when faced with the exposures of devastations brought upon the Chinese people by the same Mao’s adventurist experiments like the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution. They do not like to be reminded of those days which besmirch the image of Mao.

A typical instance of such feeling of discomfort is the decision of the CPI(ML) Liberation to expel its veteran member Kavita Krishnan in September this year. Her fault was that she expressed dissent against the party’s official line. She tried to wake up her party comrades from their nostalgic stupor by publicly reminding them of the atrocities committed by the socialist regimes of Stalin-led Russia and Mao-ruled China. Commenting on the Ukraine-Russia conflict, she

tweeted recently that these two erstwhile socialist regimes were far worse than parliamentary democracies with all their flaws.

Kavita Krishnan’s sweeping statement expressing preference for parliamentary democracies over socialist regimes, can be explained as a knee-jerk reaction against her party’s official line, or as a genuine belief in the superiority of the system of parliamentary democracy.

One can recall the record of parliamentary democracy of the US during the McCarthy era of the 1950s, when it persecuted political dissidents and drove out eminent artistes like Charles Chaplin. In fact, coming to think it, this writer often suspects that McCarthy could have borrowed the model set by Stalin in the 1930s to persecute his Russian opponents and dissident intellectuals. The methods look alike.

In the decades that followed, coming to the present times, the system of parliamentary democracy in many countries has earned notoriety for violation of human rights. Persecution of ethnic and religious minorities by racist groups, police atrocities on the poor, imprisonment of political dissidents and whistleblowers, hate speeches in the name of freedom of expression—all these happen regularly under the benign gaze of the rulers of parliamentary democracies in US, UK and the ‘largest democracy’ called India!

In other words, it does not mean that people have to choose the prevailing Western parliamentary democracies (run according to the capitalist economist system of exploitation, but swearing by democratic rhetoric), and bid goodbye to the fading socialist system of equitable distribution of resources (in spite of it being flawed by violation of democratic rights).

Here are Kavita Krishnan’s two messages where she tries to trace the roots of the present conflict to the flaws that were inherent in the system of governance in these two socialist states. In a June 26 tweet, she said: “China is a dystopian nightmare. If any Indian Communist thinks it’s OK for ‘communists’ to rule like this, then they should ask themselves what kind of democracy they’re fighting for in India?” Her next tweet was on July 3, where she said: “How much

of the Left is ignorant of—or in wilful denial of this fact? That the ‘miraculous industrialisation of USSR’ under Stalin was possible because of the violent subjugation of Ukraine’s peasants (starvation, execution, exile) and colonial expropriation of Ukraine’s grain.”

How can one disagree with Kavita Krishnan’s blunt comments about Russia and China? Now today, after all the revelations about the Stalinist terror regime in the Soviet Union (exposed by no less a person than the then Soviet President Khrushchev at his party’s 20th Congress in 1957), and the exposure of the disastrous economic and political consequences of Mao’s two experiments, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, shouldn’t the Indian Left re-assess their old understanding of these two states which had often operated in a fascist style under the garb of ‘communism’?

Today, sections of the Left are trying to propel Russia as a power that should be supported to defeat its US rival. But on what political grounds are they defending their choice? This is not a war between two ideologies—socialism and capitalism. It is not a black and white situation, divided between bad guys and good guys—the bad guys according to the Left being the US-backed Ukrainian fighters and the good guys being the Russia soldiers conscripted by Putin.

There are several dimensions to this war over Ukraine that need to be critically examined by the Left instead of taking sides. To start with, both the warring powers, US and Russia belong to the same capitalist camp. Russia under Putin is a dyed-in-the-wool capitalist state which is competing with its capitalist rival USA over occupation of the global economy and territorial spheres of political influence—often through military means. Similarly, China is following a capitalist system in its domestic economy, and an expansionist policy in its foreign affairs. Putin is at least honest enough to shed the garb of socialism. But his political buddy, Xi in his usual hypocritical style, uses the term ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’ for what actually amounts to ‘socialism with Xi characteristics’—just as happened in the past when socialism was introduced in China with ‘Maoist characteristics,’ and in the Soviet Union with ‘Stalinist characteristics.’ They were basically authoritarian regimes run under a personality cult.

To be blunt on a sarcastic note, Xi’s rhetoric of pseudo-socialism is as far removed from the essence of socialism, as the comedian Groucho Marx is from the philosopher Karl Marx, or the gorilla Kingkong from the royal dignitary King Lear! Although the names sound similar, the growls of the gorilla Kingkong

are discordant with the voices of the tragic hero King Lear of Shakespeare’s play. Xi with his megalomaniac growls, and Putin with his neo-Tzarist bluster, are drowning the faint voices of socialism.

The statements made by the various Indian Leftist outfits (referred to above) on the war in Ukraine, sound good enough in newspaper columns. They are however yet to move beyond such pacifist rhetoric, and instead formulate an alternative strategy to demarcate themselves from both the Russian and the US camps. But then, on what ideological and political basis can such an independent strategy be formulated by the Left?

The need for such an alternative Leftist strategy is not confined to the present war in Ukraine, but expands to the wider international area where the Left will have to reformulate its strategy by integrating its goal of socialism with the different aspirations and movements of nationalities, ethnic minorities, feminist demands, environmental concerns that have emerged on a global scale during the last decades. □□□

*[Sumanta Banerjee is a political commentator and writer, is the author of In The Wake of Naxalbari’ (1980 and 2008); The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta (1989) and ‘Memoirs of Roads: Calcutta from Colonial Urbanization to Global Modernization.’ (2016)]*

## XI MEETS BIDEN

### Talking Sweet Nothings?

*Evan Osnos*

**I**N THE MOMENTS BEFORE Joe Biden and Xi Jinping met in Indonesia on November 14 on the sidelines of G-20 summit for the first time as heads of state, it wasn’t clear what tone Xi would strike. Dealings between the world’s two most powerful countries have deteriorated to their most hostile status in half a century. Xi, the general secretary of China’s Communist Party, is adept at political theatrics that convey a mood or an advantage, but, at the Grand Hyatt in Bali, he greeted Biden with a ready smile and a handshake that sug-

gested there might be hope for, as China’s government later put it, a “return of China-US relations to a healthy, stable track of development.” It was a warm encounter at a chilly time—though any “return” to the former track of relations between the two countries is a goal that sounds so implausible in Washington that it underscores the span of alienation from Beijing.

Xi and Biden have known each other since they met as Vice-Presidents in 2011 and they have talked by phone or video five times during Biden’s Presidency, but, until No-

vember 14, they had not met in person. The lack of a meeting conveyed the sense of mistrust between the two sides. Other routes of communications were dwindling, too: in August, after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan in an act of protest against China’s encroachment, including its threats to invade, Xi’s government suspended climate talks and other dialogues over maritime safety, counter-narcotics, and transnational crime. In Bali, once the two sides had taken their seats, at a formal remove across an acre of flower arrangements, Biden nodded to the end of the hiatus: “It’s just great to see you,” he said, adding, “I’m committed to keeping the lines of communications open.”

It sounds like boilerplate, but the

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risk of miscommunication is real at a time when growing numbers of Chinese and American planes and ships risk collisions in Asia, and American officials worry that, the more Xi eliminates rivals in Chinese politics, the more his advisers may avoid delivering bad news of diplomatic relations. Even a hotline between the two countries has been unreliable, because “sometimes the Chinese don’t pick up.”

The Xi-Biden meeting lasted three hours, and, for the time being, the willingness to undertake more meetings seemed to be the most tangible result. White House officials announced that Secretary of State Antony Blinken will make his first trip to China, and climate envoys would resume negotiations, along with other “joint working groups.” Danny Russel, a vice-president of the Asia Society Policy Institute, who was a diplomat advising Biden during past meetings with Xi, told this correspondent he saw no sign of core concessions from either side. “But the white smoke emerging from their first in-person bilateral summit is encouraging. Direct dialogue and systemic engagement is a necessary, albeit not sufficient, condition for stemming the downward spiral of strategic rivalry,” he said.

The most sensitive issues, however, were left unresolved. Biden’s advisers were eager to hear if Xi would reveal any tension with Russian President Vladimir Putin’s aggression. In February, Xi and Putin announced a “no limits” partnership between their countries, less than three weeks before Putin’s invasion of Ukraine. Their partnership, which many foreign governments took as a sign of China’s estrangement from Western democracy, has endured through Russia’s weakening military performance, human-rights abuses, and threats of nuclear weapons. But, recently, Chinese officials have shown flashes of frustration; according to the Financial Times, a Chinese official said that “Putin didn’t tell Xi the

truth,” adding that some Chinese nationals living in Ukraine “died during the evacuation [although] we can’t make that public.” After Biden’s meeting with Xi, a White House summary said both leaders “underscored their opposition to the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine.” But the Chinese summary of the meeting made no mention of a joint position on nuclear weapons. Evan Feigenbaum, a vice-president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, tweeted that China’s silence on that point was “spectacularly unhelpful from the standpoint of publicly signaling Moscow just now.”

There is a long list of other points of tension, including China’s human-rights abuses in Xinjiang and elsewhere, American tariffs on Chinese goods, and export controls that will limit China’s access to advanced components in the semiconductor industry. None of those received top billing in this brief encounter, and each will continue to divide the two. The most pressing issue is the future of Taiwan—and, on that, the meeting made clear that neither side is prepared to negotiate their way to a lower risk of conflict. Since taking power in 2012, Xi has declared that the Communist Party’s long-running, unfulfilled goal of taking Taiwan “cannot be passed from generation to generation,” and, recently China’s army has made a show of staging military exercises—with amphibious landings—and dispatched forces to Fujian Province, near the Taiwan Strait. In Washington, those moves have heightened calls for the United States to pledge military support for Taiwan in the event of a conflict. Biden has gone further than any President in decades to say he would risk American lives to protect democracy in Taiwan, while insisting that the formal policy has not moved in the direction of greater autonomy for Taiwan.

In the press conference after his meeting with Xi, Biden reiterated that the policy “has not changed,”

and sought to tamp down speculation: “I do not think there’s any imminent attempt on the part of China to invade Taiwan,” he said. But Chinese officials have struggled to reconcile Biden’s highly visible commitments to Taiwan with his insistence that nothing has changed. It can seem, at times, like a deliberate strategy of ambiguity. In China’s formal summary of the meeting, officials gestured toward the contradiction, writing, “It is hoped that the US side will live up to its words.” Xi clearly hopes to nudge relations with America back into a calmer era. “History is the best textbook,” he told Biden, during their meeting. “So we should take history as a mirror and let it guide the future.” But, in Washington, the history of the US-China relationship is considered an unsatisfying chapter, and it’s not clear that Xi has received a clear picture of that new reality through lower diplomatic channels.

Toward the end of his comments to reporters in Bali, Biden said he was not “suggesting this is kumbaya.” There will be many disagreements to come. “But I do not believe,” he went on, that the US and China have entered “a new Cold War.” It was, it seemed more a note of aspiration than of description. □□□

[Source: *The New Yorker*]

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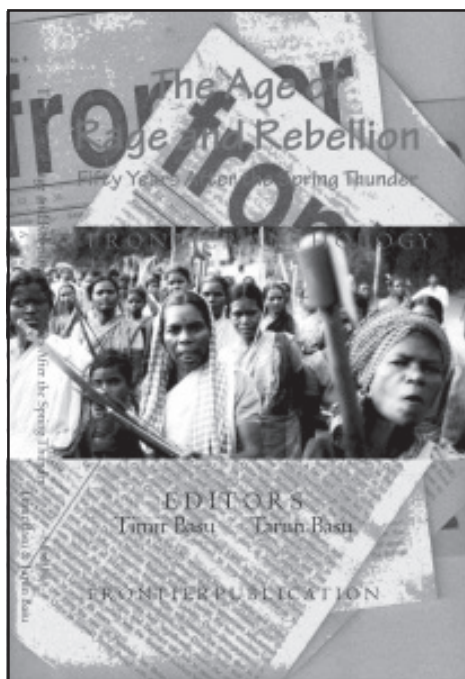
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