

frontier

Vol. 55 : No. 45

ISSN 0016-2094

May 7-13, 2023

Founder-Editor : **SAMAR SEN**

On Other Pages

Comment	2
Note	3
'ENCOUNTER' WITH BARBARISM The Republic is Dead, Long Live the Republic Satya Sagar	4
DENYING HISTORY The Mughals of Medieval India Ziya Us Salam	5
JAMINI ROY Journey Back to His Roots Tina Freese	7
THE FALL-OUT OF RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR Mixed Marriages and Splitting of Families Pearly Jacob	8
ARUN CHOWDHURY MEMORIAL LECTURE "The New Wave of Socialism in Latin America" Subhasis Mukherjee	12
100 YEARS LATER One More May Day Atanu Chakravarty	14
Letter	15

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

Published weekly for Germinal Publications Pvt. Ltd. by Sharmistha Dutta from 44, Balam Dey Street, Kolkata-700006 and Printed by her at Laser Aid, 35A/3, Biplabi Barin Ghosh Sarani, Kolkata-700 067.

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]

On The Fence

UKRAINE HAS UNITED THE WORLD", DECLARED UKRAINIAN President Volodymyr Zelensky in a speech on the first anniversary of the start of the war with Russia. If only that were true. The war has certainly united the West, but it has left the world divided. And that rift will only widen if Zelensky's friends fail to address its root causes. And many political analysts in the West are struggling to understand why some major countries in the South have opted for neutrality, rather calculated neutrality, despite American pressure.

The traditional transatlantic alliance of European and North American countries has mobilised in unprecedented fashion for a protracted conflict in Ukraine. It has offered extensive humanitarian support for internally displaced people inside Ukraine and for Ukrainian refugees. And it is preparing for what will be a massive rebuilding job after the war. But outside Europe and North America, the defence of Ukraine is not that spectacular. Few governments openly endorse the Russian action, yet many remain unpersuaded by the West's insistence that the struggle for freedom and democracy in Ukraine is also theirs. In truth America and its allies have virtually lost the trust of the major segment of the global south, thanks to Russia-Ukraine war.

The gap between the West and the rest goes beyond the rights and wrongs of the war. Instead, it is the product of deep frustration—anger about the Western-led unequal and oppressive management of globalisation since the end of the Cold War.

The Russian military action has produced remarkable unity and response from the so-called 'liberal democratic world'. Western countries have coordinated an extensive slate of economic sanctions targeting Russia. European states have increasingly aligned their climate policies on decarbonisation with national security-related commitments to end their dependence on Russian oil and gas. Western governments have rallied to support Ukraine with enormous shipments of military aid and they are continually doing it to energise Ukraine's war machine for the spring offensive. True, Europe has adopted a welcoming policy toward the eight million Ukrainian refugees within its borders.

Many in the West have been surprised at the turn of events. Clearly, so was the Kremlin. The West's unity and commitment are not matched elsewhere, however. At the beginning of the war, the UN General Assembly

voted 141 to 5, with 47 absences or abstentions, to condemn the Russian military adventure. But that result flattered to deceive. “Most non-European countries that voted to deplore Russia’s aggression last March did not follow up with sanctions. Doing the right thing at the UN can be an alibi for not doing much about the war in the real world.”

In a series of UN votes since the war started, around 40 countries representing nearly 50 percent of the

world’s population have regularly abstained or voted against motions against Russia. Fifty-eight countries abstained from a vote, in April 2022, to expel Russia from the UN Human Rights Council. For one thing two-thirds of the world’s populations live in countries that are officially neutral or indirectly supportive of Russia.

Much of the fence-sitting is not driven by disagreements over the conflict in Ukraine but is instead a symptom of a wider syndrome: anger at American and Western double

standards and frustration at stalled reform efforts in the international system which is heavily biased against the South.

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has described Russia’s military operation as a “mistake,” while claiming in a statement last summer that “Zelensky is as responsible as Putin for the war”. As things stand today Russia is not totally isolated as projected in the Western media day in and day out. □□□

[Contributed]

COMMENT

Marriage and State

MODERN NATION-STATES WERE established to secure citizenship rights and ensure egalitarian and democratic governance based on constitutional rules and regulations shaped by the values of secularism and science. These principles are central to governance and public administration. States and governments can manage various conflicts during the governance process for greater common good by adhering to constitutional values based on science and secularism.

The issues of sexuality, marriage, and divorce are individual choices and citizenship rights. States and governments are supposed to facilitate these choices to ensure inalienable citizenship rights. Civil and constitutional values are there to guide states and governments in matters of crisis and conflict during the process of ensuring individual citizenship rights. However, modern states and governments are pandering to religious and reactionary right-wing forces and enforcing laws that domesticate citizenship rights and uphold reactionary values in society, which undermines individual rights, dignity, and liberty.

Marriage, as a process and insti-

tution, is a social, emotional, and legal contract between two individuals based on their choices. States and governments should only enter into this individual space when a crime is committed, such as in cases of child marriage, conjugal and domestic violence, disputes, and acrimonious divorce. However, regardless of their ideological orientations, states and governments often engage with marriage to domesticate individual choices and uphold reactionary communitarian values. There is no place for communitarian values in the matters of marriages. Let marriage grow as a social and civil institution and an emotional process based on egalitarian friendship and love. The state and governments have no place in it. The governance of love and marriage is neither love nor marriage. It is a process of undemocratic domestication that demeans citizenship rights

There is no sin, sacred, or divine role in the matters of marriage and sexuality, and there is nothing puritanical about it. The state and government should only enter into such a private sphere if a crime is involved.

Moral arguments on sexuality and

marriage based on communitarian, religious, and reactionary cultural norms lack any form of progressive, egalitarian, and democratic values. Therefore, moral, religious, and reactionary cultural arguments need to be discarded. Feudal, patriarchal, and bourgeois hypocrisies are often branded as moral, religious, and cultural arguments to justify state and government interference in the matters of sexuality and marriage. States and governments often privilege heterosexuality and normalise reactionary social, cultural, and religious values that domesticate individuals in the matters of marriage and sexuality.

The freedom to choose love and marriage is a great equaliser in the age of various forms of discrimination based on class, race, caste, gender, and sexuality. The ability to love and marry freely can help to deepen democracy and heal social and cultural fault lines. A scientific and secular approach to marriage can only contribute towards a progressive transformation of society. Modern states and governments need to facilitate such a process and not hinder social progress. Arguments on marriage and sexuality in the name of social order and peace based on communitarian, religious, cultural, and legal grounds are fundamentally reactionary.

May 7-13, 2023

FRONTIER

3

It is individuals who form families, societies, states, governments, and laws. It is time to separate states and governments from issues of sexuality and marriage to ensure the sanctity and sovereignty of indi-

viduals' citizenship rights. Individual rights and democratic governance are inseparable twins, and democratic governance depends on scientific, secular, autonomous, and free individuals. □□□ [Contributed]

NOTE

Living on Borrowed Time?

Kathy Kelly writes:

THE EXTRAORDINARY March 10, 2023 announcement that China's top diplomat, Mr Wang Yi, helped broker a rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran suggests that major powers can benefit from believing that, as Albert Camus once put it, "words are more powerful than munitions."

This concept was also acknowledged by General Mark Milley, Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff who said on January 20th, 2023, that he believes Russia's war in Ukraine will conclude with negotiations rather than on the battlefield. In November of 2022, asked about prospects for diplomacy in Ukraine, Milley noted that the early refusal to negotiate in World War One compounded human suffering and led to millions more casualties.

"So when there's an opportunity to negotiate, when peace can be achieved...seize the moment," Milley told the Economic Club of New York.

"War is worse than an earthquake," a surgeon, Saeed Abuhassan, told this writer during Israel's 2008-2009 bombing of Gaza, called Operation Cast Lead. He pointed out that rescuers come from all over the world following an earthquake, but when wars are waged, governments send only more munitions, prolonging the agony.

As the world enters the second year of war between Ukraine and

Russia, some say it's unconscionable for peace activists to clamor for a cease-fire and immediate negotiations. Is it more honourable to watch the pile-up of body bags, the funerals, the grave digging, the towns becoming uninhabitable, and the escalation that could lead to a world war or even a nuclear war?

Estimates of Russian and Ukrainian military casualties vary, but some have suggested that more than 200,000 soldiers on both sides have been killed or wounded.

Gearing up for a major offensive before the spring thaw, Russia's government announced it would pay a bonus to troops that destroy weapons used by Ukrainian soldiers which were sent from abroad. The blood money bonus is chilling, but on an exponentially greater level, major weapons manufacturers have accrued a steady bonanza of "bonuses" since the war began.

Shortly after Western countries agreed to send sophisticated Abrams and Leopard tanks to Ukraine, an adviser to Ukraine's Defense Ministry, Yuriy Sak, spoke confidently about getting F-16 fighter jets next. "They didn't want to give us heavy artillery and then they did. They didn't want to give us Himars systems and then they did. They didn't want to give us tanks, now they're giving us tanks. Apart from nuclear weapons, there is nothing left that we will not get," he told Reuters.

Ukraine isn't likely to get nuclear

BOOKS BY T VIJAYENDRA

Just Released

REQUIEM FOR OUR TIMES Rs. 100

**AFTER ALL IT IS ONLY HIM!
AND OTHER STORIES** Rs. 70

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

Second reprint Rs. 40

**THE LOSERS SHALL
INHERIT THE WORLD**

Third Reprint Rs. 60

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

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

For Copies Contact :

MANCHI PUSTAKAM

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

Email: info@manchipustakam.in

Cell: +91 73822 97430

weapons, but the danger of nuclear war was clarified in a Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists statement on January 24, which set the Doomsday Clock for 2023 to ninety seconds before the metaphorical "midnight." The scientists warned that effects of the Russia-Ukraine war are not limited to an alarming increase in nuclear danger; they also undermine global efforts to combat climate change. "Countries dependent on Russian oil and gas have sought to diversify their supplies and suppliers," the report notes, "leading to expanded investment in natural gas exactly when such investment should have been shrinking."

Over the past decade, this writer was fortunate to be hosted in dozens of trips to Kabul, Afghanistan, by young Afghans who fervently believed that words could be stronger than weapons. They espoused a simple, pragmatic proverb: "Blood does not wash away blood." □□□

'ENCOUNTER' WITH BARBARISM

The Republic is Dead, Long Live the Republic

Satya Sagar

THE BRUTAL MURDERS OF the politician Atiq Ahmed and his brother Ashraf in police custody and that too in front of rolling TV cameras corroborates the worst kept secret about the Republic of India. That far from being the 'Mother of Democracy' it has in fact become a poster 'Child of Barbarism'.

Encounter killings or custodial deaths are only teasers to the full horror movie that this country is today. Lynching of Muslims by Hindu mobs, routine state-backed communal violence against religious minorities, deliberate subversion of law by those in power and debasement of democratic institutions are the norm.

None of this is surprising, given that for the past nine years India has been ruled by the most petty, sectarian, callous and incompetent regime it has ever seen in its entire existence as an independent nation. With its goal of establishing a 'Hindu Rashtra' the incumbent regime of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is destroying everything that the country was once cherished for—tolerance, non-violence, spiritual wisdom and of course, its vast and vibrant diversity.

What makes the Hindutva phenomenon different from any of its political rivals is its open attempt to overturn the Indian Constitution and establish a theological, majoritarian dictatorship. A dictatorship working solely for the benefit of traditional caste and corporate elites, who are drawn to each other by the common desire to rule without resistance or accountability. A Hindu Rashtra, where religious minorities, Dalits, Adivasis, women, workers, peasants, the poor in general will be second class citizens on a permanent basis.

A dystopian new order where everyone will 'know their place' and quietly accept it or perish under the iron heels of the savarna police state.

The net result is that the Republic of India, which emerged seventy five years ago with great hope from the fire of anti-colonial struggles, is dead—'encountered' by Hindutva. Its corpse lies decaying on alleyways of the nation today, with no one to give it a decent funeral, as fanatical mobs roam the streets shouting 'Jai Shri Ram!'

What is the pathway to a future India where everyone can live in peace but also with justice and dignity? What can one do to regenerate hope?

Difficult questions with no certain answers but one can begin with trying to understand the roots of barbarism visible all around in Indian society today. Isn't what is happening to the Muslims and Christians in India now eerily similar to the way Dalits and Adivasis have been treated for millennia?

And to clarify here—barbarism in India is not just about violence by state or private actors carried out with impunity—it is even more so about the untold misery of a bulk of the Indian population due to their social and economic context.

India ranks among the most unequal countries on the globe in terms of wealth distribution. It has the world's largest number of people in absolute poverty and the highest burden of disease and malnutrition among adults and children. Discrimination on the basis of caste and gender is rampant. On all these and many other fronts India has the worst indicators in the world and given the size of our population we are talking about the suffering of

hundreds of millions of people.

If anything the rise of Hindutva has been possible largely due to the inability of previous Indian regimes to solve such fundamental challenges facing the country. Despite some genuine good work done since Independence the fact remains that in all these decades India's rulers have failed to make much of a dent on all these problems.

What prevented previous Indian governments from making an honest and sincere effort to help lift its citizens out of such deep, inhuman and needless misery? Is it just the lack of resources, technical incompetence, bureaucratic laziness or something else?

The answer to the first question is that, the bulk of India's poor come from the same set of communities— Dalits, Adivasis, backward castes and the poorer sections of religious minorities—those who 'converted' to escape the oppression of the Hindu caste system long ago.

And while sloth and corruption have played their role, the real reason why these communities never get their due share of power or resources is that India is run by a tiny elite of so-called 'upper caste' Hindus. Across the ideological spectrum —this savarna elite dominates everything from politics, economy, education, culture and key institutions like the judiciary, media, police and armed forces.

If there are any benefits going to Dalits, backward castes, Adivasis and the poorer sections of religious minorities it is solely because of the 'one citizen, one vote' principle enshrined in the Indian Constitution. The masses draw their importance only because they determine the outcome of elections. Take away the right to vote or make the vote meaningless by purchasing elected representatives—as the current regime has

been doing blatantly—and the presence of the government working for ‘public welfare’ of any kind will disappear too.

This colonial ruler-like section, does not really give a damn whether the rest of those in the country live or die. In other words it is plain that—India is actually an apartheid state masquerading as not just a modern democracy—but as the ‘Mother of Democracy’ itself! It would all be so laughable if not for the fact that people are talking about over a billion plus Indians subjected to the barbaric rule of caste-supremacists, forcing them to live in sub-human conditions.

The origins of this racist social system go back to between 9,000 and 5,000 years ago, when waves of migrants from Anatolia, the Caucasus and Iran descended upon the Indian subcontinent and established their hegemony over not just land and resources but over the spiritual and cultural lives of the original people of India. The story of Hinduism and Indian society—in all its dimensions—is essentially about how this hegemony evolved—through the process of the ‘Three C’s—Conquest, Compromise and Co-option’ (which continues even now).

A modern equivalent of this process in another context is the way European migrants, invaders, refu-

gees have transformed South America—in just over five centuries—since Christopher Columbus first set foot on the Bahamas. A proto-caste system is clearly visible there today—particularly in those parts where indigenous people have not been completely wiped out—with the whites at the top, mestizos in the middle, blacks and native Indians right at the bottom.

What is clear is that opposing barbarism in India really means granting people right at the bottom of the country’s social hierarchy their true political and social status. And for this to happen they will need both economic and civilisational justice.

Economic justice here means the actual redistribution of wealth to the poorest communities and citizens, in the form of land, finance or other assets, to enable them to start living a dignified and secure life. A simple formula can be to divide national resources among all communities in proportion to their population.

The growing demand by Indian opposition parties for a caste census—which will reveal the actual numbers of different communities across India—is a historical step forward in this direction.

However, economic justice will need to be supplemented by challenging the cultural and spiritual hegemony of Hindutva. This can be

done by insisting on civilisational justice, which means recognising the primacy of those who represent the longest, unbroken legacy of living in harmony with soil, earth, water and sky of the Indian subcontinent—the Dalit and indigenous people of India.

They are the original inhabitants and protectors of the entire subcontinent, brutally and tragically pushed off their lands, enslaved, their way of life destroyed by colonising migrants, settlers, invaders, marauders of all kinds over the centuries. Civilisational justice calls for the recognition of Adivasis and Dalits as the ‘moolnivasis’ or ‘original people’ of India. Interestingly, this again is a demand that is already gaining popularity among both Dalit and Adivasi communities and needs to be built up to make it even more popular and accepted.

A logical corollary to civilisational justice would be for the Indian government and state to apologise to these communities for all atrocities committed against them over the millennia. It also means removing racist, abusive terms like ‘rakshasa’, ‘dasyu’, ‘danav’ from all religious texts, which treat ‘moolnivasis’ as subhuman creatures to be vanquished and exterminated. □□□

Satya Sagar is a journalist and public health worker who can be reached at sagamama@gmail.com
[Source: countercurrents.org]

DENYING HISTORY

The Mughals of Medieval India

Ziya Us Salam

WITHIN HOURS OF THE National Council of Educational Research and Training’s (NCERT) decision to remove a chapter on the Mughals from the history textbooks for Class XII students, noted historians of the country issued a statement, denouncing the deletions. “The selective drop-

ping of chapters which do not fit into the ideological orientation of the present dispensation exposes the partisan agenda of the regime,” a statement signed by Romila Thapar, Irfan Habib, Aditya Mukherjee, Barbara Metcalf, Dilip Simeon and Mridula Mukherjee, among others, read. “Driven by such an agenda,

the chapter titled ‘Kings and Chronicles: The Mughal Courts’ has been deleted... In medieval times, the Mughal Empire and the Vijayanagara Empire were two of the most important empires... In the revised version, while the chapter on the Mughals has been deleted, the chapter on the Vijayanagara Empire has been retained.”

It’s hard to understand the history of modern India without the contribution of the Mughals, who, including Akbar, Jahangir, Shah

Jahan and Aurangzeb, were all born in undivided India; and were buried here. None of them ever left the country, not even to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca. "Is there anything in India today which does not owe to the Mughals?" asks Syed Ali Nadeem Rezavi, secretary, Indian History Congress. "From legal system to legal jargon, India owes to the Mughal and Turkish Sultanate before them. Words like vakalatnama, kacheri, durbar; people owe them all to the Mughals. Today, when a large number of Indians consider Lord Ram as a major deity, people have to thank Tulsidas who wrote his version of Ramayana during the Mughal period. Also, Vrindavan, associated with Lord Krishna, developed thanks to Chaitanya saints who were given grants by Akbar, Jahangir and Shahjahan, and helped Vrindavan and Mathura emerge as a key centre of Krishna Bhakti."

It all started with Babur when he defeated Ibrahim Lodi in the First Battle of Panipat in 1526, and went on to capture all of North India in his brief reign of four years. Babur's victory was to usher in a prolonged period of political stability for the next nearly 200 years. His grandson Akbar ruled for almost 50 years, as did Akbar's great grandson Aurangzeb while his son Jahangir and Shah

Jahan ruled for over 20 years each, making sure there was consistency in state policy and the development of the empire was unimpeded. Their influence gradually reduced from 1707 onwards, and the last Mughal, Bahadur Shah Zafar, was only a symbolic leader of the Revolt of 1857. However, in this symbolism lay a message; common Indians, as evidenced by the sipahis' uprising, considered Mughals to be their kings; hence the leadership role to Zafar.

This was a throwback to the golden era of the Great Mughals; the latter Mughals, post-1707, had done nothing to earn that kind of trust. Aurangzeb's prolonged battles in the Deccan had enfeebled the state's finances, and his successors were unable to replenish the treasury. To augment resources, Aurangzeb had imposed jizyah, a tax solely on non-Muslims, which proved detrimental in the long run. Once Aurangzeb passed away in 1707, his successors proved incapable of ruling over a huge, unwieldy empire. Their internecine battles didn't help. Many like Mohammed Shah Rangeela were given to a life of debauchery. Add to that the gradual advance of East India Company in India and the latter Mughals proved unequal to the task of defending their empire. It all came to a sad end with the banishment of Zafar to Rangoon after the 1857 revolt.

It started more promisingly. A descendant of Timur and Genghis Khan, Babur, who knew Turkish and Persian, started the practice of chronicling the events and noting down his impressions of the landscape and the artists he met. He thus authored a unique document Baburnama, originally in Turkish which was later translated into Persian. Not just Baburnama, the Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Upanishads were also translated during the Mughal

era. "The first translations of texts like the Ramayana and Mahabharata in any language from Sanskrit was done under the Mughals. Dara Shukoh translated 25 Upanishads into Persian. He also translated Yogavashishta," says Mr Rezavi.

Incidentally, Shukoh, the man who never became the king, was way ahead of the times. Eldest son of Shah Jahan, he was a Sunni Muslim who associated closely with Hindu philosophers and Christian priests. He was, as Vincent Smith wrote in the Oxford History of India, "deeply imbued with the pantheistic mysticism of the Sufis".

Shukoh clearly inherited all this from Jalaluddin Akbar, the Emperor who built Ibadat Khana where scholarly debates were held between Brahmins, Christians, Jain, Buddhist and Islamic scholars. It was a move way ahead of the time when one thinks until then the religion of the Emperor was supposed to be religion of the kingdom. The modern Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb stems from that shared feeling, a synthesis of different cultures. The philosophical discussions during the time of Akbar and his son Jahangir led to intermingling among commoners. In Mughal India, Hindus and Muslims lived cheek by jowl in the same locality. The respect extended to places of worship. Often land grants for temples were made by the Mughal emperors; even the much maligned Aurangzeb, who demolished temples, issued grants.

By the end of the reign of Akbar, the population of the Mughal kingdom exceeded that of entire Europe, and the Mughal wealth was unmatched. As Mr Rezavi put it, "Today, there is talk of Akhand Bharat. This was a reality under the Mughals who controlled the entire subcontinent comprising parts of modern Afghanistan, the entire Pakistan, Bangladesh and parts of Myanmar, the land mass from Sindh to knock-

Just Published
WITH THE
PASSING TIME

by **Farooque Chowdhury**

Published by : **NGG Books**

4, Aati Bazar, Keraniganj,
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Email: nggbooks@gmail.com

Website: www.nggbooks.wordpress.com

Price: 400tk

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

May 7-13, 2023

FRONTIER

7

ing distance of Kanyakumari and even parts of Assam under Aurangzeb for a few years. Shah Jahan was the first Indian ruler after Ashoka to reach Balkh and Badakshan. There was no mightier empire in the world.”

The richness was owed substantially to the Rajputs, who were sharers of power from the time of Akbar, who defeated Rana Pratap in the Battle of Haldighati, and co-opted

them in his empire through matrimonial alliances. Most Mughal rulers after Jahangir were born to Rajput women. As a result, within the family, Hindavi was often the language of communication. Aurangzeb, incidentally, conversed in Hindi and composed in Braj bhasha.

Today, when hue and cry is raised if a Muslim enacts a Hindu hero in cinema, it's important to remember

that during the time of the Mughals, Raskhan wrote of Krishna in Hindi and Balkrishan Brahman in Persian. It was a time of synthesis: Hindu practices were adopted to commemorate Imam Hussain and the concept of triple dome mosque architecture, popularised by the Mughals, is uniquely Indian. Just like the Mughals.

□□□

JAMINI ROY

Journey Back to His Roots

Tina Freese

BORN IN BENGAL'S BANKURA district, Jamini Roy was trained in Western classical art and impressionism but he finally found his true inspiration back home in the Kalighat Pat style and went on to create some iconic pieces of art.

A 75-year-old building located in the historical streets of South Kolkata was recently acquired by Mumbai-based art gallery DAG. The building, which is all set to become India's first private single-artist museum, is more than just a mix of old wood windows and bricks.

The house called Ballygunge Place house has seen the birth, rise and peak of veteran artist Jamini Roy. One of the most celebrated artists in Bengal, Jamini's work, often considered to be of modernist approach, was appreciated by icons like Gandhi and Nehru.

Roy was also declared a National Treasure Artist by the Government of India in 1976. So, who is this artist, and what is his life story?

Born on 11 April, 1887, in Bengal's Bankura district, Roy was always interested in arts and painting. Discovering the boy's interest in painting, his family sent him to study at the Government College of Art, Kolkata.

Abanindranath Tagore, the

founder of Bengal School, taught Roy academic traditional drawing, classical nudes and painting in oils. In 1908, the artist graduated from the college with a fine arts degree. This form of art was popular at the time, and Roy's initial work reflects the influence of the Western classical style of art.

He started off his career as a commissioned portrait painter. While Roy was practising Western classical art and impressionism to follow the conventional style at the time, he never found his soul in his work. Although the artist had mastered the strokes and the colours, he could never draw inspiration from Western concepts.

Krishna Chaitanya, in his book *A History of Indian Painting, Volume 2*, points out that it was his initial Western classical works that “enabled him to make a livelihood while starting out and his learnings in impressionism are reflected in later paintings”.

By 1930, Roy decided to leave the Western style of painting and focus on the Kalighat Pat style.

Looking for inspiration gave his life an interesting turn.

A report in the *Firstpost* states, “It happened that Abanindranath Tagore's idea of Indianisation of art

and Rabindranath Tagore's essay *The Hermitage*, published in *Prabasi*, the famous Bengali literary magazine of the time, in 1908, which Jamini Roy read thoroughly in 1923, inspired him into nationalism and searching for his roots.”

He found his true calling in 1925 when he saw a few Kalighat paintings displayed outside the Kalighat temple in Kolkata. The almond-shaped eyes, round faces, curvy bodies and colourful contours attracted Roy, and he decided to learn and perfect this art.

By 1930, he had made a complete switch from Western to traditional art styles—mostly Patua scroll paintings and the Kalighat Pat style.

Chaitanya, in his book, explains that Roy believed that the lives of ordinary people were more important than the lives of kings, leaders, and politicians. He abandoned the use of Western paints and opted for natural pigments from flowers, mud, chalk, “local rock dust mixed with the glue of tamarind seeds”, or even the white of an egg.

Sourcing his inspiration from Kalighat painting, he even abandoned the canvas and started painting on indigenous painting surfaces—such as cloth, woven mats, and wood coated with lime.

The paintings that Jamini made received worldwide recognition. The *Firstpost* report states that JBS Haldane (Sir William Dunn Reader in Biochemistry at Cambridge Uni-

versity in the 1920s) and his sister Naomi Mitichison said, “How is it that Jamini Roy’s pictures are so simple, but you go on looking at for years and don’t get tired.”

By 1940, the popularity of his works soared and his paintings were becoming prized possessions in both Bengali and European households. As Roy drew his common people, he wanted his art to be accessible to the common folks.

While his popularity was reaching the skies, he never sold his paintings for more than Rs 350. Out of the 20,000 pieces he made in his lifetime, his only goal was that his paintings reach those he drew inspiration from.

“But on gaining international recognition, Roy’s paintings ended up being sold upwards of \$10,000, and sometimes, even for a fortune. Take a look at the price tags that a British collector once slapped on three of Roy’s paintings—Christ with the Cross estimated at £8,000–£12,000, an untitled painting estimated at £6,000–£8,000, and Santal Drummers estimated at £8,000–£12,000,” an article in *The Print* states.

In 1955, Roy was awarded the Padma Bhushan to honour his work. After his death, at the age of 85, on 24 April, 1972, the Ministry of Culture declared him one of the “nine

masters” whose work was considered to be a national treasure.

Even after his death, Roy continues to be a popular point of discussion among art lovers. He is often considered to be one of the earliest modernists in India.

His artwork still continues to be displayed both nationally and internationally. Some of his famous works consist of *Gopini*, *Santhal Dancers*, *Mother and Child*, *Krishna Balram*, *Standing Woman*, *Cat and the Lobster*, *Three Pujarans*, and his most famous work, *Ramayana*—a painting spread across 17 canvases tracing the entire epic.

Recently, his 75-year-old home was undertaken by DAG to be converted into a museum. The move will in the truest sense make his work and life available to the common man.

The museum, according to DAG, will be equipped with state-of-the-art galleries to house the permanent collection—as well as rotating exhibitions, community spaces like a resource centre and a library, art workshops and event spaces, as well as a museum shop and cafe.

The interior of the building will be restored, and the museum will be built on an area of 7,284 sq ft spread across three floors, a courtyard with outhouse and terrace spaces, reports the *Hindustan Times*.

The artist never sold his paintings for more than Rs 350 even when his work was getting international recognition.

Arkamitra Roy, great-granddaughter of Jamini Roy, in a statement to PTI, said, “I have grown up hearing my mother’s stories and memories of her grandfather and his art and his discipline and the way his studio was his temple.”

“We are delighted that DAG is sharing the legacy of my great grandfather’s house as well as his art practice with the people of Bengal and art lovers everywhere. He always wanted his art to reach the people and this is the ideal way to pay homage to him,” she said. □□□

[Edited by Pranita Bhat]

References:

Kolkata house of veteran artist Jamini Roy to be turned into museum: DAG: by PTI, Published on 29 March 2023

Jamini Roy, one of India’s ‘national treasures’ who never sold paintings for more than Rs 350: by Pia Krishnankutty for *The Print*, Published on 24 April 2020

Jamini Roy: by Cultural India for Cultural India

Tracing Jamini Roy’s evolution as a painter, from Western styles to indigenous forms: by Ashok Neg for *First Post*, published on 9 December 2021

A journey to the roots of Jamini Roy’s art: by Samrat Chakrabarty for *The Hindu*, published on 9 June 2015.

[Courtesy: *thebetterindia.com*]

THE FALL-OUT OF RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

Mixed Marriages and Splitting of Families

Pearly Jacob

OKSANA SLIPCHENKO, who is Ukrainian, and Sergio Skudin, who is Russian, first met on New Year’s Eve 2018, during a three-day train journey across Belarus. Oksana, a professional pianist who worked as a concertmaster at a music school in Irpin, Ukraine, was immediately

drawn to the shy, soft-spoken Sergio, an archaeologist and independent researcher who often worked on expeditions for the Russian Academy of Sciences.

An initial friendship soon blossomed into a long-distance relationship, with the two frequently crisscrossing borders to see each other.

In the summer of 2020, they married in Kyiv. Oksana quit her job and moved to Russia, accompanying Sergio on archaeological digs, including a months-long expedition to the site of the ancient Greek colony of Chersonesus in Sevastopol in Russian-occupied Crimea.

Oksana’s father, who became mistrustful of Russians after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, was initially opposed to her marriage. “But when he saw Sergio for the first time, he said, ‘OK! It’s your choice,

May 7-13, 2023

FRONTIER

9

maybe he's not 100 percent Russian,' Oksana recalls.

The political enmity between their countries—and the fighting in eastern Ukraine—were topics the couple frequently discussed, but these never came in the way of their relationship. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine a year ago changed that.

At the time of the invasion, the couple was living in the southeastern Russian city of Rostov-on-Don. "I was full of hatred for Russia and pain for my people. I knew I just had to get away," 30-year-old Oksana recalls.

Sergio suggested they head south to Georgia, one of the few countries where they could enter visa-free with their respective passports. After a long overland bus trip, they crossed into Georgia on March 4, travelling just with what they could carry in their backpacks.

Since arriving in the Georgian capital, the couple has moved homes twice. Rent has soared with the influx of an estimated 100,000 Russian exiles—some of them opposed to the war and some escaping sanctions or mobilisation—who far outnumber the 25,000 Ukrainians who sought refuge in Georgia.

One of their biggest initial challenges was finding employment. Oksana found work as a piano teacher and tuner and occasionally plays in restaurants and bars. But 38-year-old Sergio has struggled to bring in an income.

Instead, he has been caring for Oksana's mother, a wheelchair user who survived the Russian siege of Bucha in the early weeks of the fighting by hiding in a basement. She was evacuated to Tbilisi and now shares the apartment with the couple.

Oksana's mother Tanya, Oksana and Sergio live together in a one-bedroom apartment that they rent in the eastern suburbs of Tbilisi. Oksana and Sergio sleep in the bed-

room, while Oksana's mother occupies a corner of the dining area.

Sergio has an air of bewilderment as he tries to describe his thoughts about the war. "I feel disappointment and shame," he says finally.

He says he is opposed to the war, but at a time when many Ukrainians accuse Russian citizens of inaction, he believes common Russians are powerless. "Even if people protested daily, I doubt it can change anything with the strong military regime in place," he explains.

But he admits that he might not have left Russia if not for Oksana.

"Sergio is not a political person," Oksana chimes in defensively.

She says that her anger is directed towards the Russian regime and its army of "orcs"—not at Russian citizens. "I still try to believe in humanity," she explains.

But the war has brought new tensions to their life together. Financial worries, uncertainty about the future and Sergio giving up his academic career have strained the relationship.

Oksana often feels guilty that Sergio has not found work, and as the more digitally savvy of the two, is helping him learn a software programme in the hopes that he can continue his career online.

Discussions about the war itself have also been a source of friction, with the couple disagreeing over differences in the words they use. Only once has this turned into a huge argument after Sergio read out Russian news headlines referring to the October bombing of a key bridge in Crimea as a "terrorist act".

"I got mad and screamed how it could be a 'terrorist attack' to bomb a bridge" when Russian soldiers "were bombing apartments and killing children and women every day", Oksana recalls.

After that incident, they have tried not to talk about the war.

Like Oksana and Sergio, other

FRONTIER

44, Baram Dey Street, Kolkata-700006

Phone: (033) 2530-0065

Mail: frontierweekly@yahoo.co.in

frontierweekly@hotmail.com

Site: www.frontierweekly.com

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

India [Annual] Rs. 500

Frontier Associate [Annual] Rs. 1500

Life Subscription [Inland] Rs. 5000+

Make payment by Cheque/Draft
in favour of FRONTIER or

GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.

or

FRONTIER [GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS
PVT. LTD.]

MO should be addressed to Frontier
Please add Rs. 50/- to inland outstation
cheques towards bank charges, all
remittances to FRONTIER

**Payment could be made directly to
our bank accounts as given below.**

**Check the bank details before
transferring money. Also inform us
through e-mail after sending money.**

Beneficiary Name:

GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.

Bank Name: CENTRAL BANK OF INDIA

Address: 8, Lenin Sarani, Kol-700013

Branch: Esplanade Branch

Current Account Number: 3116713216

IFSC Code: CBIN0280098

Swift Code: CBININBBCAL

OR

GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.

Bank Name: PUNJAB NATIONAL BANK

Address : 223, C. R. Avenue, Kolkata-6

Branch: Jorasanko Branch

Current Account Number: 0085050001319

IFSC Code: PUNB0008020

Branch Code : 0008020

Swift Code: UTBIINBBOBC

OR

FRONTIER

(GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD)

Bank Name: PUNJAB NATIONAL BANK

Address : 223, C. R. Avenue, Kolkata-6

Branch: Jorasanko Branch

Current Account Number: 0085050001378

IFSC Code: PUNB0008020

Branch Code : 0008020

Swift Code: UTBIINBBOBC

*For MO, Regd. Post and Speed Post
mailing address should be written in the
following fashion :

To, **FRONTIER**

C/o Durbar Mahila Samanwya Committee

44, Baram Dey Street, Kolkata-700006

West Bengal

Contact Number : 8240016324

Ukrainian-Russian couples in Georgia are having to navigate the new challenges the war has brought to their relationships.

Mariam Pesvianidze, a Georgian-Russian filmmaker born and raised in Moscow, and her Ukrainian boyfriend struggled to openly discuss the war after the invasion began in 2022.

Mariam Pesvianidze, a 34-year-old Russian-Georgian filmmaker born and raised in Moscow, knows all too well about having to choose her words carefully when discussing the war with her Ukrainian boyfriend.

The couple has lived together in Tbilisi since 2018, but despite their shared political views, some topics have become taboo since the war began.

"I need to be careful not to say anything to trigger him. Any mention of problems faced by Russians, even Russian activists and political dissidents, upsets him," says Mariam.

Her boyfriend, she explains, believes that given the enormous suffering in Ukraine, Russians have no right to complain about their situation.

She says her political views were influenced by her Georgian father, who separated from her Russian mother following 32 years of marriage after she announced her support for Putin and the annexation of Crimea over a family dinner.

Within the year, both father and daughter had left Russia. Mariam initially moved to Odesa in Ukraine, but when Nemtsov was assassinated in 2015, she decided to join her father in Tbilisi, where she set up a film production company with some Ukrainian friends and launched one of the city's first plastic recycling non-profits.

It was through mutual Ukrainian friends that she first met her boyfriend. "At first I found him annoying and loud, but I was soon enamoured by his huge teddy bear personality and large heart," she says of her 32-year-old boyfriend

who declined to be interviewed for this story.

Her partner had initially moved to Tbilisi to recuperate from shrapnel injuries he sustained while serving in the Ukrainian army in Donbas.

"He already hated the Putin regime and Russian politics back then, but [his anger] was never directed personally at anyone," says Mariam.

Mariam and her boyfriend could once have long intense conversations about Russian politics and society without them turning into arguments. They mixed with like-minded Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians. But since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, things have changed.

In Georgia, people started questioning the culpability and collective responsibility of Russian citizens opting to flee their country rather than resist their government.

Solidarity with Ukraine, and animosity towards the wealthier new immigrants who are seen as pricing out locals, are visible in graffiti telling Russians to "go home".

This sentiment has taken a toll on her friendships, says Mariam, who is an active pro-Ukrainian anti-war campaigner. "It was hard for me to hear terrible things about all Russians—painting us all with one brush. It was like our friendship didn't matter any more," she says, explaining that she also left the production company she co-founded to avoid causing discomfort.

Her boyfriend stopped interacting with his Russian friends and, with the two of them living together, Mariam had to resort to meeting her Russian friends only outside.

Mariam understands that the influx of Russians into Tbilisi was difficult for her boyfriend who was already dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from his time in the army. Mariam has turned to therapy to discuss her relationship while also focusing on her and her boyfriend's planned future together.

She says they are applying for visas to move to Canada, where her boyfriend hopes to put some distance between him and the war he is reminded of daily.

Diana Khabibulina, a psychologist in Tbilisi, is familiar with the friction between Russians and Ukrainians that has erupted since the war.

As a volunteer with a local group that was set up to provide free counselling to the first wave of Ukrainian women and children who arrived in Georgia as refugees, Khabibulina's team initially provided group therapy to Ukrainians as well as ethnic Russians who had escaped from Kherson during the early days of the war.

Some Russians living in Georgia also signed up for therapy sessions that were conducted in Russian. "Everyone was in shock and there were a lot of mixed emotions. [The war] triggered pain and trauma in everyone," she recalls. But soon, with tensions getting in the way, group therapy sessions were replaced with individual counselling for some people.

"They did not know how to communicate with each other... Many Russians were also coping with a lot of guilt and could not express themselves freely," says Khabibulina.

She fears that the breakdown in relations between the groups, particularly for people with families on both sides of the conflict, could lead to individual and collective trauma with effects felt for decades to come.

Khabibulina, who is of Russian and Georgian heritage, recalls how the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the brutal civil war that followed in Georgia from 1992 to 1994—when Russian-backed separatists took control of the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia—left deep scars and fuelled mistrust among different ethnic groups in Georgia for years. "My family has lived here for generations but some of our neighbours stopped

May 7-13, 2023

FRONTIER

11

talking to us because they saw us as Russians. I was a young girl then and this stayed with me for a long time,” the 46-year-old explains.

But for Levan Pevsianidze, Mariam’s 60-year-old father, separation was inevitable. “If your spiritual and moral values don’t connect, that’s when you can’t sustain a relationship any longer,” he insists.

“When the person I considered my closest ally was happy [Russia] took Crimea ‘back’, it was the end of my relationship,” Levan says candidly.

He and his wife had met in Dresden as engineering students during the Soviet Union and moved to Moscow where they continued to live after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

A burly man with a hearty laugh, Levan, says he is still grateful for his life with his ex-wife with whom he owned a successful marketing business in Moscow, even though he was always uneasy about living in Russia and taking on a Russian passport as the former Soviet republics became independent nations. But every time he expressed a desire for them to move to Georgia, his then-wife, with whom he had three children, would dissuade him, pointing to their comfortable life. Levan’s discomfort grew when Putin came into power and gradually cemented his authoritarian rule.

Levan recalls how his wife opposed Russia’s 2008 war on Georgia. But her views changed over the years when it came to Ukraine, believing that Russia had a right to Crimea and that the current invasion was spurred by the West trying to expand the NATO bloc.

Ukrainian-born Dimitri, a pseudonym to protect his identity, and his Russian wife have found themselves on opposite sides of the conflict.

They met at a local boxing gym in their late teens. “Back then, there was no war, no Crimea. We were very young and deeply in love,” recounts

Dimitri who, due to security concerns, preferred to correspond over WhatsApp messages from Moscow.

They married in their early 20s and had their first child in 2014. At the time, Dimitri, now 30, never imagined that a war between their two countries would become the subject of bitter arguments, after which he has sometimes asked himself why he married the “enemy”.

Dimitri says his wife, a devout Orthodox Christian, has been conditioned by her family and the church to believe that Russia’s invasion was an act of self-defence against the West.

In the early days of the war, the couple argued frequently, nearly splitting up twice. When Dimitri insisted they leave Russia, they were among the tens of thousands of Russians who caught the last available flights out of Russia and into Tbilisi in March.

But very soon, the couple with three children below the age of 10, found themselves unable to afford the high cost of rent. After five months in Tbilisi, they flew back to Moscow.

The two have since agreed to work out their differences for their children, but Dimitri says it is a daily struggle to fight the grind of Russian propaganda his wife consumes on TV and social media. With all criticism of what Russia calls its “special military operation” punishable with up to 15 years imprisonment, there are no voices to counter the steady stream of state-sponsored disinformation.

Dimitri was born in Kyiv and was a child when his family moved to Russia in search of work in the late 1990s, a time of economic, social and political tumult for post-Soviet countries following the dissolution of the USSR. In Moscow, he earned a law degree and, after a few years working at a Russian law firm, obtained a Russian passport.

But he has always felt like an outsider. “I’ve always remained Ukrainian at heart. That’s how my

parents raised me. I speak Ukrainian fluently still and wore the vyshyvanka [traditional embroidered Ukrainian shirt] in Moscow ... I’ve lived with [Russians] almost all my life but they almost always called me khokhol [a derogatory term that refers to a Ukrainian Cossack topknot hairstyle],” wrote Dimitri.

Since returning to Moscow, Dimitri has found some comfort and purpose by working as a defence lawyer for captured Ukrainian soldiers—a job with risks given his Ukrainian heritage, and the reason he requested anonymity.

Although his wife, who is a stay-at-home mother, remains unsure about Russia’s role as an aggressor in the war, she is compassionate about the plight of Ukrainian prisoners of war.

Experts have warned of the enormous long-term mental health consequences of the war for Ukrainians. “Populations that are affected by military conflict, violence and displacement, are much more vulnerable to mental health disorders like depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorders,” says Dr Darejan Javakhishvili, a professor of psychology at Tbilisi’s Ilia State University. And these can affect people’s relationships—whether with partners, families or friends, she adds.

She suggests that many Russians may face a huge moral dilemma. “We can only speculate. But there is a chance that many Russians are caught between their identity and loyalty to the Russian statehood and their internal values,” Javakhishvili reflects.

She believes that moral injury, or the psychological distress arising from perpetrating, witnessing or failing to prevent actions that go against a person’s morals, could be quite high among Russians.

“The war experience”, direct or indirect, is a “traumatic stress” that can heavily affect relationship dy-

namics, adds Nino Makhashvili, a psychotherapist, researcher and colleague of Javakhishvili. This, she says, could apply to anyone emotionally affected by the war, be it Ukrainians, Russians, Georgians or anyone closely following the events that identifies strongly with one of the sides.

People may become “short-tempered, irritable, even aggressive or withdrawn”, she explains.

“Unfortunately, we saw splitting of a lot of families since 2014 and not only mixed marriages, but Ukrai-

nian couples who did not share the same ideology,” Makhashvili explains over email.

“Every family has its dysfunctions,” Javakhishvili says. But if partners have a mutual understanding of the other’s beliefs, it’s a good basis “to try and work through differences. There is not any one single reason for [the] collapse of relationships ... and [the] Russian-Ukrainian war cannot be one single reason for divorce.”

Drawing on past research, both experts believe that trauma from this war is likely to persist beyond

the present generation.

Oksana and Sergio see the war as cindering any possibility of them living in Ukraine. Despite Ukrainians welcoming Russian dissidents over the years and those fighting for Ukraine, Oksana believes that Sergio would be akin to the enemy. “I cannot ask that of him [to live in Ukraine] for the sake of my own people,” she says.

For Oksana, the war is a “new reality”.

“It will stay with us for a long time.” □□□ [Source: *Al Jazeera*]

ARUN CHOWDHURY MEMORIAL LECTURE

“The New Wave of Socialism in Latin America”

Subhasis Mukherjee

PROF EDGAR ISCH LOPEZ, an eminent social scientist from Central University of Ecuador and former minister in the leftist government of Ecuador, delivered the 7th Arun Chowdhury Memorial Lecture on 31 March 2023 at Sarala Roy Memorial Hall. Prof Isch spoke on “The New Wave of Socialism in Latin America-Vibrancy and its Lessons”. The session was chaired by Sri Anirban Chattopadhyay, eminent Editor and Columnist.

Arun Chowdhury was born in Kolkata, Bengal, British India on 31st March, 1929, became a member of the CPI in 1947 and took part in various mass movements. Joining as Headmaster of Nagari High School, in Nagari village, Birbhum, West Bengal in 1953, he tirelessly engaged himself in building new schools for the marginalised people in the district. He devoted most of his life to the service of the Communist movement in Bengal and in helping the socially oppressed. In addition to his political activities, he was a scholar of regional history and folk culture. He was also an ardent proponent of tribal rights, history and culture. He pushed for

recognition and integration of tribal languages, scripts and history within Government affiliated curricula in West Bengal. Mr Chowdhury breathed his last on 18th June 2015.

Arun Chowdhury Memorial Trust has been organising the annual memorial lecture since 2016 on subjects having social significance.

The evening started with Dr Abhijit Chowdhury - eminent physician and a leading figure in community health and education initiative in West Bengal - welcoming the audience on behalf of Arun Chowdhury Memorial Trust and briefly elaborating the background of selection of the subject and the speaker, and articulated the expectations of the audience. Sri Biman Basu, veteran Left leader of West Bengal formally felicitated Prof Isch.

While introducing the speaker Sri Anirban Chattopadhyay briefly described Prof Isch’s background and the relevance of the story of Latin America’s anti-imperialist struggle in the Indian context, although the regions are thousands of miles apart. He also said “...we in West Bengal and Kolkata have always been kind of enamoured by the Literature,

Culture, Music and radical politics of Latin America” and that’s the reason for the eagerness of the audience to hear about their new ways of struggle against imperialism and neo-liberalism.

Prof Isch delivered his lecture with the help of a presentation. He narrated the geo-political similarities and differences among different nations in Latin America. Latin America is “one of the biggest eco-diverse regions of the world” with the mountainous Andean region, with big rivers, forests and water which for ages have been targets of imperialist plunder. People in Latin America say “Our country is so rich that it has been stolen so much and yet we still have it.”

Prof Isch recalled the rich history of Latin America and its famed empires: Maya, Aztec, Inca. The people and nations have a pool of indigenous knowledge on Agriculture, Hydraulic management, Architecture engineering etc.

Demographically Latin American and Caribbean countries possess gender equity and are mostly young. If one takes 100 people as a sample, 29 will be under 14 years of age, 27 between 15 and 29, 38 between 30 and 65 and 6 would be older. If classified, according to the ethnic groups, 35 of the 100 people will be white, 29 Mixed or mestizo (a new

May 7-13, 2023

FRONTIER

13

cultural reality), 24 Afro-descendants, 11 Indigenous and rest would belong to different minority groups.

Latin American countries have a chequered history of struggle against colonial rulers. Through the nineteenth century the fights were led by the "Criollos" who were descendants of the Spanish. However, independence from colonial rulers was the "last day of this despotism and the first day of the same". Post-independence, social injustice conditions were maintained, including slavery. The first independent nation was Haiti. The black slaves took the flags of the French revolution but for this they have not been forgiven until today. In the Andes region, the figure of Simon Bolivar was the main inspiration.

Coming to the present situation, Prof Isch told about the deep rooted inequality across the nations. "Today there are walls that separate people in extreme poverty from people who are very wealthy." With representative photographs, he demonstrated the "Physical and symbolic walls". According to him, "the social division of the colonial era has left deep marks and it is aggravated by the class division of capitalism". Further, 'the old colonial division by race or by skin colour is still present today. For this reason it is necessary to decolonise thought, laws and social practices. In general, the system of oppression combines a condition of social class, a condition of gender and ethnic condition'.

Some of the other realities of Latin America, as told by Prof Isch are that "International statistics place Latin America as a region with the greatest inequality in the world. Across Latin America, 140 million people, around 55% of the workforce, are in the informal economy and almost 1 in 5, lives in slums. Up to 52 million people could fall into poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean, as a result of

the Covid pandemic, taking the fight against poverty back 15 years."

Latin America faced imperialist domination in various forms: direct invasions, Coups etc. Also external debt is being used as a system of chaining and imposition of neoliberalism. The imposition is also achieved through controlled International Trade. Moreover there are controls over the news media, and socio-cultural apparatus like Churches, television and movies. Educational plans are being introduced based on neoliberal values.

There are American military bases in Latin American countries. 12 in Panama, 9 in Columbia, 8 in Peru, 3 in Mexico, 3 in Honduras and 2 in Paraguay.

In spite of the odds there are popular struggles across Latin America. Workers are fighting for their rights. The neoliberal governments have weakened the workers' organisations though they are active and in the process of recovery. Indigenous peoples have a long history of struggle. They are the ones who confront the 'extractivist' companies plundering the region of its vast natural resources. Indigenous peoples' idea of Sumakkawsay (good coexistence) ushered constitutional changes to include the rights of nature.

Women movements are very active and are very close to the workers and indigenous organisations. Peasants are fighting for land, water and traditional and indigenous ways of producing and protecting seeds. Teachers and students are fighting for the right to education. Youth are more active for their rights and for environmental issues and for a new society.

But Prof Isch clarified that the struggles are mostly "fought for the dream of improving the family and territorial situation" and "still little for a new society".

According to him "There are many differences between progressive socialist, liberation Christians,

feminists, indigenous and Marxist positions. Many of these differences are expressed at the electoral level. However, unity in action is usually present in popular uprisings and in social struggle". As for inspiration for struggle, "influence of the Cuban revolution is present but has weakened compared to the situation in the 20th century" and Che Guevara remains an icon for the youth.

He reiterated that "in the current conditions, there are very few organisations that favour the armed struggle, although there is no wavering on the need for revolutionary violence as a principle. ...The parliamentary and electoral struggle, in most cases, is seen as an accumulation of forces and as a demonstration of what the people can do through local governments". Consequently "when governments fail, it is a hard blow to the positions of the left and in favour of socialism".

Prof Isch elaborated different realities popular movements are facing across Latin America. In Brazil there is a democratic alliance between the left and the nationalist right. A leftist government attacked by Imperialism today is also fighting against corruption in Venezuela. In Bolivia, there is a strong indigenous presence in the government who are championing the Andean indigenous worldview. In Columbia, for the first time it has a democratic and left-wing government. It must face fascist currents. In Mexico, a nationalist government is listening to popular demands and has the strength to face political onslaught of imperialism.

Governments in Argentina and Chile are national "popular projects". They make reforms which are not radical enough.

In Ecuador, the neoliberal government is very much weakened and it is possible that the president will have to face a political trial (impeachment). A section of the Right wants to use popular movement in

their favour, but it is the indigenous and popular forces that are driving the trial. Whereas in El Salvador, an authoritarian government is talking about promoting capitalism based on crypto currencies. Peru has the most reactionary regime and the Right has carried out a coup. More than 100 people died in the protest. However the popular forces are continuing their struggle.

Prof Isch ended his lecture by saying that "History isn't defined by cycles and let's consider the fact that "people make history" by constantly transforming society and themselves with advances and setbacks that resemble a zigzag. Conscious and voluntary action of the people, however, is determined by historical and specific productive

conditions". He reminded Engles as quoted by Rosa Luxemburg "Capitalist society is faced with a dilemma: advance to socialism or return to barbarism" and concluded with the call "The present is for struggle. The future is ours".

The question-answer session was a vibrant one and reflected the synergy the lecture was able to create. Asked about the character of the present Chilean regime, Prof Isch answered that at best it can be termed as a popular nationalist government and no reason to consider it as a socialist one. Asked why recent popular movements in Latin America have so far failed to produce a black leader, his answer was that grass-roots movements in Latin America do have a lot of contradic-

tions and are trying to overcome them. The question of having a black leadership is one such contradiction. On how the Chinese investments in Latin America are being looked upon by anti-imperialist movements, he answered that at least they are better than the American imperialists who have their military bases in most Latin American countries and definitely, Chinese investments are not considered as a "socialist" one.

The lecture was attended by leaders and activists from the Left movements in Kolkata and around West Bengal.

At the end Dr Jayati Chakraborty, offered the Vote of Thanks on behalf of the Foundation.

□□□

100 YEARS LATER

One More May Day

Atanu Chakravarty

THIS YEAR'S MAY DAY IN India marks the completion of a century of the first May Day celebration in India, after 37 years of sacrifice of the Chicago workers in 1886. The first May Day flag was hoisted by Singaravelar at Marina Beach in Chennai on May Day, 1923. The day became the day of the working class of the whole world because it was a day of declaration of war by workers for 8 hours work day which was subsequently won.

In April 1896, Lenin wrote a leaflet for the Union of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class for May Day, where he emphasised that workers all over the world need to improve their material conditions, to raise their wages, to shorten the working day, to protect themselves from abuse, and must read intelligent and useful books. Lenin said, "Our strength lies in Union; our salvation in united, stub-

born and energetic resistance to our exploiters." During that period, various towns of Russia-- Yaroslavl, Taikovo, Kiev, Moscow and many others witnessed a series of strikes, a majority of which ended successfully for the workers. "But even unsuccessful strikes", Lenin mentioned in this leaflet, "are only apparently unsuccessful. In reality they frighten the bosses terribly, cause them great losses, and force them to grant concessions for fear of a new strike." Those valuable teachings are still relevant today.

But, this May Day marks the reversal of the hard won rights of the workers and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi is hell bent to snatch all the above by passing the four labour codes: the right to strike, the right to form unions are now under severe attack. All Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)- ruled states have started implementing 12-hour work, introducing fixed term employment,

women working in night shifts, removing the vast majority of industries from the purview of any labour law by introducing a threshold level of workers strength of 300, etc. Even non- BJP ruled states are now no exception. Barring a few, most of the states have already framed state rules under the light of the Centre's notorious labour codes.

The Modi Government has already accorded statutory status to National Floor Level Wages which is around Rs 5,000 per month. Now, they want to depress wages by making minimum wages as a non-mandatory category as and when the codes are implemented. Even the states led by opposition parties like DMK have introduced bills to exempt some industries or group of industries from implementation of the Factories Act, in order to comply with the demand of the corporates. The budget allocation for MNREGA scheme is being drastically slashed to push rural workers to rush to urban areas only to facilitate availability of cheapest labour in abundance for the corporates.

The noted development econo-

May 7-13, 2023

FRONTIER

15

mist Mr Jean Dreze makes startling observations regarding drastic decline in the growth of real wages from 2014-15 to 2021-22. He observes, "The growth rate of real wages between 2014-15 and 2021-22 was below one percent per year across the board: more precisely 0.9 percent, 0.2 percent and 0.3 percent for agricultural labour, construction workers and non-agricultural labour respectively." In several states, like Haryana, Kerala, Punjab, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu, real wages have actually declined in the period mentioned above. Underemployment, reduced wages, wage cut, retrenchment, lockouts, lay-offs and closures have become the order of the day. The much trumpeted rapid economic growth is a misnomer so far the human development indicators are concerned. The real wages remaining stagnant, disparity and inequality are growing phenomenally.

The gender-wage gap is increasing at an alarming rate. Women are being paid much lesser for the same and similar kind of job. The government as an employer doesn't even recognise more than a million persons who are in the forefront of delivering certain essential services as regular workers. Anganwadi work-

ers, para teachers in the Sarva-Shiksha Abhijan and ASHA are denied of employees rights.

Modi's vision for 2047 is to create a workforce similar to gig and platform workers who are desperate and frustrated. This is a class of workers who are not entitled to get any legal protection like job security, wage security and social security. After assuming the presidency of G20, a working group has been formed to work on developing a workforce akin to gig and platform workers, training institutes are being made as training centres for corporate companies. The funding and training modules are being synchronised with corporate needs. The teachers of the ITIs are proposed to be trained by the same corporate companies. Welfare boards under various acts, including construction labour board are being systematically dismantled, replaced by a mirage of e-SHRAM, which offers nothing more than a death benefit of two lakhs and a permanent disability benefit of one lakh. This e-SHRAM is being pushed only to drastically cut down whatever meagre benefits hitherto was offered by the welfare boards.

Modi's model of development

narrative of producing more jobs through more and more privatisation and lakhs of crores of concession and tax relief to corporates has only proved to be a big hoax. The country is facing the highest rate of unemployment and job loss. This phenomenon is best explained by the fact that the biggest corporate empire owned by the Adani family provides just around twenty thousand jobs!

On this May Day 2023, the working class of the country must again stand up and pledge to reverse all the attacks of capital as was witnessed in the case of historic farmers' movement which forced the despotic Modi regime to repeal three anti-farmer black laws. Let the workers' be reminded of the eight hour song that used to be sung in 1880's Chicago, whose last lines go something like this:

*"We want to feel the sunshine; We want to smell the flowers
We're sure that God has willed it,
And we mean to have eight hours.
We're summoning our forces from
Ship Yard, shop and mill;
Eight hours for work, eight hours
for rest
And eight hours for what we will".*

[atanutu@gmail.co]

LETTER

Famine

Somalia is suffering from the impact of a climate crisis it has done almost nothing to create, United Nations chief Antonio Guterres said recently, as a full-blown famine threatens to follow a drought that killed 43,000 people last year.

Some 8.3 million Somalis, almost half the population, require urgent humanitarian assistance, Guterres said, adding that only 15% of the country's \$2.6 billion aid requirement for this year has been met.

"When famine looms, this is totally unacceptable," Guterres told reporters in Mogadishu.

He was speaking after visiting a camp in Baidoa, south-west Somalia, for people displaced by the drought and by fighting between al Shabaab, an al Qaeda affiliate, and government forces.

"It is unconscionable that Somalis, who have done almost nothing to create the climate crisis, are suffering its terrible impact," Guterres said. "Climate change is causing chaos."

After five consecutive failed rainy seasons, the drought has displaced 1.4 million Somalis, with women and children making up 80% of them, he said.

The Integrated Food Security

Phase Classification (IPC), which sets the global standard for determining the severity of a food crisis, said last December that famine had been temporarily averted but warned the situation was getting worse.

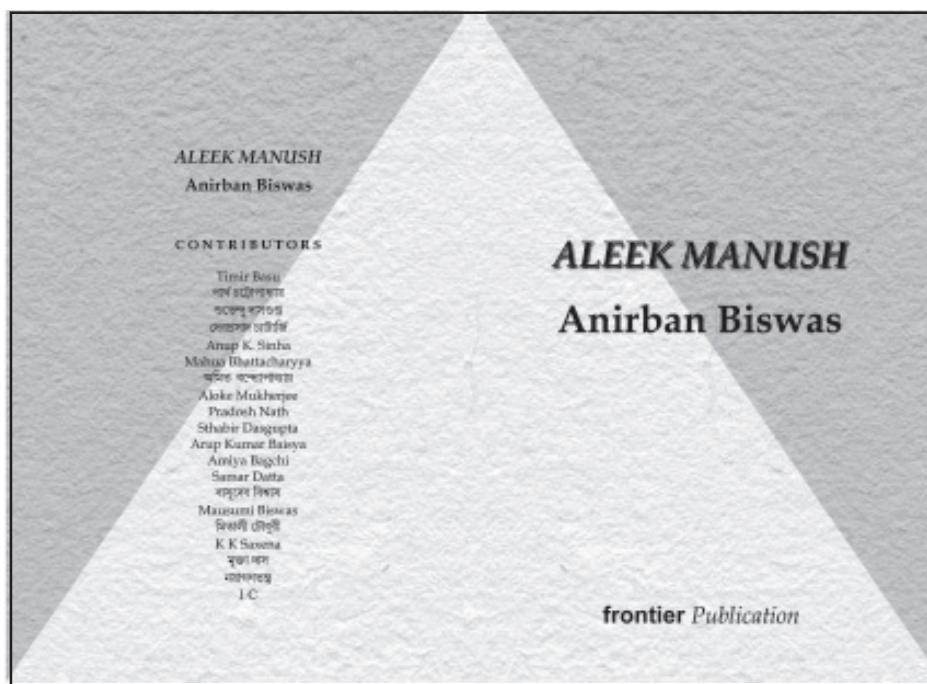
A major government offensive backed by allied clan militias has captured around a third of al Shabaab's territory, the U S ambassador to Somalia told Voice of America in March.

The government claims to have killed 3,000 al Shabaab fighters since the campaign was launched last year, but the militant group has repeatedly shown its ability to strike back in deadly attacks on Mogadishu.

A Reader

A **frontier** Publication

Just Released



ALEEK MANUSH

Anirban Biswas

COMPILATION TEAM:

TIMIR BASU, ARUP SEN, NABINANDA SEN, TARUN BASU

CONTRIBUTORS:

TIMIR BASU, PARTHA CHATTOPADHYAY, SHUBHENDU DASGUPTA,
DEBAPROSAD CHATTERJEE, ANUP K. SINHA, MAHUA BHATTACHARYYA,
AMIT BANDYOPADHYAY, ALOKE MUKHERJEE, PRADOSH NATH, STHABIR
DASGUPTA, ARUP KUMAR BAISYA, AMIYA BAGCHI, SAMAR DATTA,
BASUDEB BISWAS, MAUSUMI BISWAS, MITALI CHOWDHURY, K K SAXENA,
MUKTA DAS, NAYAGANATANTRA, I C

Available at:

Frontier Office, Patiram Stall (College Street), Dhyانبindu
and other book stalls selling issues of frontier.

Contribution: INR 100