

frontier

Vol. 55 : No. 46

ISSN 0016-2094

May 14-20, 2023

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

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

Panic in Paradise

WORKERS AROUND THE WORLD ARE SHOWING A GROWING desire to exercise their fundamental labour rights in response to the dual threats of a lingering pandemic-induced job cuts and an abnormal spike in cost of living. Employers everywhere refuse to honour workers' universal right to join union. The situation is no better even in industrially advanced countries, not to speak of backward third world regimes, many of which are out and out authoritarian. In India new labour codes introduced by the right-wing Modi government will make it extremely difficult to organise labour in trade union. Hard-earned union rights are being ruthlessly curtailed by the corporates with the connivance of persons in power. They now frequently resort to lay-offs and retrenchments while workers look helpless in absence of basic labour rights. Rightist populism that dominates polity at the moment, in most countries, including so-called advanced western democracies, is a new weapon to bash labour.

Much to the dismay of global business tycoons this year workers and employees in many places chose May Day to launch their agitation programme and serve strike notice. People attended the traditional May Day rally in large numbers in France against the French pension reform law and for social justice. In France workers took to the streets in Paris and other big cities during Trade Union organised protests against President Emmanuel Macron's increase in retirement age. Elsewhere employees of the largest labour union in the Netherlands, FNV resolved to go on strike to force the union itself to pay them higher wages. The union leaders said their employers had missed a May 1 ultimatum to raise its wage offer for the coming years. They said this would result in a general strike by FNV staff, with more strike action to follow if demands are not met.

And in Italy the three main unions held a huge rally in the southern city of Protenza protesting against a labour package approved by Prime Minister Georgia Melani's far right government.

Meanwhile, thousands of film and television writers will go on strike throwing Hollywood into turmoil as the entertainment enterprises grapple with seismic changes triggered by the global streaming TV boom. The Writers Guild of America called its first work stoppage in 15 years after failing to reach an agreement for higher pay from studios such as Walt and Netflix. The last strike lasted 100 days and cost the industry more than \$ 2 billion. In truth employers understand only one language—the language

of stalled production and loss in profit. For one thing even people in America are now facing crisis for technological up-gradation. Then a union representing American Airlines Group pilots said its members had authorised a strike mandate ahead of the busy summer travel season.

And Bangladesh workers got into focus as the Industri ALL observed the 10th anniversary of the Rana Plaza disaster when more than 1,100 people died because the Plaza—the eight-storey building housing five garment factories collapsed.

The tragedy of Rana Plaza served as a turning point for the textile and garment industry as the Bangladesh Accord was created. Unions were

able to turn a calamity into a historic agreement to make the garment factories safer. As per the agreement workers now have the right to refuse unsafe work. But in a situation of acute unemployment workers are being forced to work in unsafe conditions, notwithstanding the Accord. Toward the end of last year the Accord was extended to Pakistan. To date 46 brands have signed the Pakistan Accord. But the fight for the garments workers working with health hazards and risks, is not yet over. More brands need to join the Accord, especially in North America, to gain the leverage essential to make this a truly global Accord. Garment factory workers are

mostly women and they deserve a workplace that could provide living wage and decent working atmosphere, not a concrete ghetto that threatens to take their lives.

The impact of Russia-Ukraine war on the economy globally is enormous as it has fuelled inflation and unprecedented price rise of essential commodities making things difficult even for organised sector workers. As for the unorganised sector millions the less said the better. The May Day rallies could have been a war-cry against war dictated in the main by the American military-industrial complex. No, that didn't happen. Workers finished their May Day meeting by demanding fair wages only. □□□ [Contributed]

COMMENT

Abdul Rashid and Godse

RECENTLY (APRIL 2023), THE NCERT decided to make many deletions from School text books. Apart from the parts related to Mughal history, the mention of Gujarat violence and the origin of Caste Varna system, what stands deleted is also a part related to Gandhi murder.

One recalls that murder of Swami Shradhanand was done by a Muslim Abdul Rashid. Gandhi condemned the murder but addressed Rashid as brother and said that he should not be blamed for this murder; instead those who created the atmosphere of hate should be blamed. On the same lines Gandhi saw Godse being the manifestation of Hate prevalent in the society.

Of course Gandhi was not there to opine about Godse after his murder but his attitude to the dastardly act became clear when in 1944 Godse tried to attack him with a dagger in Panchagani near Pune. In response Gandhi “asked Godse to spend eight days with him so that they could understand each other.

In both the cases of Abdul Rashid and Godse, Gandhi was on the same wave length..

In a communiqué issued on February 4, 1948, the Central government said it was banning the RSS “to root out the forces of hate and violence that are at work in the country and imperil the freedom of the Nation and darken her fair name.”

In a letter to M.S. Golwalkar, Patel writes, “All their speeches (RSS members, added) were filled with communal poison... As a final result of the poison, the country had to suffer the sacrifice of the invaluable life of Gandhiji.”

RSS propagates that mentioning the ban on RSS is half truth as the ban was lifted by courts as being illegal. The Paragraph which has been deleted precisely mentions that ban was imposed for sometime only. As such from Gandhi to Patel and Nehru they all realised that more than Godse as a person it is the Hate which is responsible for the

violence, including that of murder of Swami Shradhanand and later of Gandhi. While RSS ban was not valid on legal ground, its ban was prompted by RSS spreading the Hate which led to violence and murders, including that of Gandhi. While paying lip service to Mahatma, RSS continues to do what it began, spreading Hate against Muslims and at the same time glorifying the old hierarchical society.

Understanding hate imbibed by Abdul Rashid and Godse in today's context will mean that those youth who are waving lathis, swords and pistol in the religious processions are guilty of course but the bigger blame has to be apportioned to the indoctrination of Hate ideology, hate speech and the social media which is constantly blaring the Hate against religious minorities. Looking in the neighbourhood it confirms that nationalism in the name of religion is the main weapon which is creating and propagating Hate. In a way India is following the path of Pakistan and Srilanka. In Pakistan (Islamic Nationalism) the Hate manufactured against Hindus and Christians did result in their persecution

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there. In Srilanka (Buddhist Sinhala Nationalism) Hindus (Tamils) and Muslim- Christians, have been on the receiving end of consequences of Hate.

Now with these deletions in text books those upholding Hindu nationalism and their advocates are further intensifying the Hate. □□□

[Contributed]

NOTE

Violation of Labour Rights

Arup Kumar Sen writes:

MAY DAY IS CELEBRATED all over the world as a milestone in the struggle for labour rights. However, violation of labour rights is the order of the day. Making the workers footloose is the central tenet of neoliberal capitalism.

The Indian State facilitated the dilution of rights of workers through reform of labour laws in COVID-times. People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) documented major reforms in labour laws in its Statement issued on May 15, 2020. It observed: "PUCL is deeply concerned at the swiftness with which many states in the nation are dismantling the protection afforded to workers under their various labour laws...The country is currently witnessing a massive human tragedy as lakhs of migrant workers found themselves stranded during the lockdown, without any means of getting food or work...Many of these workers have not been paid for months. Again, had the laws relating to timely payment of wages been enforced, many of these workers would not have been forced to take desperate measures like walking thousands of kilometres back to their homes."

In the above context of documenting the predicament of migrant workers, PUCL observed the dilution of labour laws initiated by the different state governments. To put it in the words of the PUCL Statement: "As the country is slowly emerging from the lockdown, the working citizens of this country are at their

most vulnerable, facing threats of mass layoffs and firings with depleted reserves of cash and food. This is the time when they most need the protection of labour laws to ensure that they are not unduly exploited. PUCL is alarmed by the ordinances cleared by Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat cabinets, which would indiscriminately suspend all labour laws except a few basic ones, for close to three years. Notifications by the governments of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana have also suspended crucial portions of their labour legislations. We fear that these moves would force a large proportion of our population to inhuman servitude and destitution, and condemn them in no uncertain terms."

There is no concrete evidence that the general conditions of workers have improved in the post-pandemic period. An article carried in The Hindu on May 1, 2023, observed: "By extending the hours of work and ensuring job insecurity, we are setting the clock back to the 19th century in the name of ease of doing business. Due to lack of political unity as well as trade union cooperation, save a few instances, States are able to change labour laws without much opposition... Trade unions have a lot to be concerned about this May Day."

In fact, the dominant Left parties and trade union federations have failed miserably to give protection to vulnerable workers. Workers should

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look for new forms of labour organisation to protect their life and livelihood. It may be mentioned in this connection that the eminent Marxist thinker, Antonio Gramsci, argued that the "true process of proletarian revolution cannot be identified with the development and action of revolutionary organisations of a voluntary and contractual type, such as the political party or the trade unions" as these organisations are born on the terrain of bourgeois democracy and political liberty. Gramsci identified 'factory council' as the alternative form of workers' organisation and argued that its formation coincides with the consciousness of the working class in pursuit of autonomous emancipation from Capital. (See Antonio Gramsci, 'The Turin Workers' Councils' in Robin Blackburn ed., Revolution and Class Struggle: A Reader in Marxist Politics, Harvester Press, UK, 1978)

Whether the existing labour organisations would come forward in facilitating the birth of new forms of grassroots labour organisation and labour politics is an open question. □

MUSTO'S COLUMN

The Relevance of Friedrich Engels

Marcello Musto

BORN MORE THAN 200 years ago, on November 28, 1820, in Barmen, Germany (today a suburb of Wuppertal), Friedrich Engels was a promising young man whose father, a textile industrialist, had denied him a chance to study at university and instead guided him into his private firm. Engels, an atheist, was self-taught and had a voracious appetite for knowledge. He signed his pieces with a pseudonym to avoid conflict with his conservative, strongly religious family.

The two years he spent in England—where he was sent at the age of twenty-two to work in Manchester, at the offices of the Ermen & Engels cotton mill—were decisive for the maturation of his political convictions. It was there that he personally observed the effects of capitalist exploitation of the proletariat, private property, and competition between individuals. He made contact with the Chartist movement and fell in love with an Irish working woman, Mary Burns, who played a key role in his development. A brilliant journalist, he published accounts in Germany on English social struggles and wrote for the English-speaking press about the social advances underway on the Continent. The article “Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy”, published in the Franco-German Yearbooks in 1844, aroused great interest in Marx, who at the time had decided to devote all his energies to the same subject. The two began a theoretical and political collaboration that would last for the rest of their lives.

Engels' Influence

In 1845, Engels published his first book in German, *The Condition of*

the Working Class in England. As its subtitle emphasized, that work was based “on direct observation and genuine sources”, and Engels wrote in the preface that real knowledge of proletarian working and living conditions was “absolutely necessary to be able to provide solid ground for socialist theories”. In his introductory dedication, “To the Working Class of England”, Engels further pointed out that his work “in the field” had given him direct, not abstract, “knowledge of the workers’ real lives”. He had never been discriminated against or “treated by them as a foreigner”, and he was happy to see that they were free of the “terrible curse of national narrowness and national arrogance”.

In the same year that the French government expelled Marx because of his communist activities, Engels followed him to Brussels. There, they published *The Holy Family*, or the *Critique of Critical Criticism? Against Bruno Bauer and Company* (his first joint book with Marx) and the two also produced a voluminous unpublished manuscript—*The German Ideology*—that was left to the “gnawing criticism of mice”. In the same period, Engels went to England with his friend and showed Marx first-hand what he had earlier seen and understood about the capitalist mode of production. It was then that Marx gave up the critique of post-Hegelian philosophy and began the long journey that led, twenty years later, to the first volume of *Capital*. The two friends also wrote the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848) and participated in the revolutions of 1848.

In 1849, following the defeat of the revolution, Marx was forced to

move to England, and Engels soon crossed the channel after him. Marx took lodgings in London, while Engels went to manage the family business in Manchester, some three hundred kilometers away. He had become, as he put it, the “second fiddle” to Marx, and in order to support himself and to help his friend (who was often without an income) he agreed to manage his father’s factory in Manchester, until 1870.

The Marx-Engels Correspondence

During these two decades, the two men lived the most intense period of their lives, comparing notes several times a week on the main political and economic events of the age. Most of the 2,500 letters they exchanged date from between 1849 and 1870, during which time they also sent some 1,500 items of correspondence to activists and intellectuals in nearly twenty countries. To this imposing total should be added a good 10,000 letters to Engels and Marx from third parties, and another 6,000 which, though no longer traceable, are known with certainty to have existed. This correspondence is a treasure, containing ideas which, in some cases, neither Marx nor Engels succeeded in fully developing in their writings.

Few nineteenth-century correspondences can boast references as erudite as those that flowed from the pens of the two communist revolutionaries. Marx read nine languages and Engels mastered as many as twelve. Their letters are striking for their constant switching between languages and for their number of learned quotations, including ancient Latin and Greek. The two humanists were also great lovers of literature. Marx knew passages from Shakespeare by heart and never tired of leafing through his volumes of Aeschylus, Dante and Balzac. Engels was for a

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longtime president of the Schiller Institute in Manchester and worshipped Aristotle, Goethe and Lessing. Along with constant discussion of international events and revolutionary possibilities, many of their exchanges concerned the major contemporary advances in technology, geology, chemistry, physics, mathematics and anthropology. Marx always considered Engels an indispensable interlocutor, consulting his critical mind whenever he had to take a position on a controversial matter.

While great intellectual companions, the sentimental relationship between the two men was even more extraordinary. Marx confided all his personal difficulties to Engels, beginning with his terrible material hardship and the numerous health problems that tormented him for decades. Engels showed total self-abnegation in helping Marx and his family, always doing everything in his power to ensure them a dignified existence and to facilitate the completion of Capital. Marx was ever grateful for this financial assistance, as we can see from what he wrote one night in August 1867, a few minutes after he had finished correcting the proofs of Volume One: "I owe it to you alone that this was possible".

Engels' Theoretical Contribution

Even during those twenty years, however, Engels never ceased to write. In 1850 he published *The Peasant War in Germany*, a history of the revolts in 1524-25. There, Engels sought to show how similar the middle-class behavior at the time was to that of the petty bourgeoisie during the revolution of 1848-49, and how responsible it had been for the defeats incurred. In order to allow Marx to devote more time to the completion of his economic studies, between 1851 and 1862 Engels also wrote nearly half of the five hundred articles that Marx contributed to the *New-York Tribune* (the

paper with the largest circulation in the United States). He reported to the American public on the course and possible outcomes of the many wars that took place in Europe. On more than one occasion he managed to foresee developments and to anticipate the military strategies used on various fronts, earning for himself the sobriquet by which he was known to all his comrades: "the General". His journalistic activity continued for a long time, and in 1870-71, while he was also very active in the International Working Men's Association, he published his *Notes on the Franco-Prussian War*, a series of sixty articles for the English daily *Pall Mall Gazette* analyzing the military events preceding the Paris Commune. These were well received and testified to his perspicacity on military matters.

Over the next fifteen years, Engels made his principal theoretical contributions in a series of writings directed against political opponents in the workers' movement. Between 1872 and 1873 he wrote a series of three articles for the *Volksstaat* that were also released, as a pamphlet, with the title *The Housing Question*. Engels' intention was to oppose the spread of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's ideas in Germany and to make clear to workers that reformist policies could not replace a proletarian revolution. *The Anti-Dühring*, published in 1878, which he described as "a more or less connected exposition of the dialectical method and the communist world outlook", became a crucial point of reference for the formation of Marxist doctrine.

Although Engels's efforts to popularise Marx—polemicising with other simplistic readings—should be distinguished from the vulgarisations of the later generation of German Social Democracy, his recourse to the natural sciences did open the way to an evolutionary conception

of social phenomena that diminished Marx's more nuanced analyses. *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880), a reworking of three chapters of *Anti-Dühring*, had an even greater impact than the original text. But despite its merits, and the fact that it circulated almost as widely as the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Engels's definitions of "science" and "scientific socialism" would subsequently be used by the Marxist-Leninist vulgate to preclude any critical discussion of the theses of the "founders of communism".

The Dialectic of Nature, fragments of a project on which Engels worked sporadically between 1873 and 1883, has been the object of huge controversy. For some it was the cornerstone of Marxism, while for others the main culprit in the birth of Soviet dogmatism. Today it should be read as an incomplete work, revealing Engel's limitations but also the potential contained in his ecological critique. While his use of dialectics there certainly reduced the theoretical and methodological complexity of Marx's thought, it would be incorrect to hold it respon-

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sible –as many have done– for everything they find disagreeable in Marx’s writings, or to blame Engels alone for theoretical errors or even political defeats.

In 1884, Engels published *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, an analysis of the anthropological studies conducted by the American Lewis Morgan. Morgan had discovered that matriarchal relations historically preceded patriarchal relations. For Engels, this was as important a revelation concerning the origins of humanity as “Darwin’s theory [was] for biology and Marx’s theory of surplus-value for political economy”. The family already contained the antagonisms that would later be developed in society and the state. The first class oppression to appear in human history “coincided with the oppression of the female sex by the male”. With regard to gender equality, as well as anticolonial struggles, Engels never hesitated to uphold the cause of emancipation. Finally, in 1886, he published a polemical work that took aim at the resurgence of idealism in Ger-

man academic circles, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (1886).

Reading Engels in 2023

Engels outlived Marx by twelve years. During that time he devoted himself to his friend’s literary estate and to the leadership of the international workers’ movement. His enormous contribution to the growth of workers’ parties in Germany, France and Britain is evident in a number of journalistic pieces for the major socialist papers of the time, including *Die Neue Zeit*, *Le Socialiste* and *Critica Sociale*, in greetings to party congresses, as well as the hundreds of letters that he wrote in this period. Engels wrote extensively on the birth and ongoing debates concerning the Second International, whose founding congress took place on 14 July 1889. Even more important, he devoted his energies to the spread of Marxism.

Engels was charged with the extremely difficult task of preparing for publication the drafts of Volumes Two and Three of *Capital* that Marx had not managed to complete. He

also oversaw new editions of previously published works, a number of translations, and wrote prefaces and after words to various republications of Marx’s works. In a new introduction to *Marx’s Class Struggles in France* (1850), composed a few months before his death, Engels elaborated a theory of revolution that tried to adapt to the new political scene in Europe. The proletariat had become the social majority, he argued, and the prospect of taking power through electoral means—with universal suffrage—made it possible to defend revolution and legality at the same time.

Different from the German Social Democrats, who manipulated his text in a legalistic, reformist sense, Engels insisted that the “fight on the streets” still had its place in the revolution. The revolution, Engels continued, could not be conceived without the active participation of the masses, and this required “long and patient work”. Reading Engels today, more than 200 years on from his birth, fills marxists with a new desire to strike out along the path he blazed. □□□

A TRIBUTE

Ranajit Guha (1923-2023)

Partha Chatterjee

WHEN SAMAR SEN, Editor of *Frontier*, presented Ranajit Guha with a copy of his memoirs called *Babu Brittanta* (A Babu’s Tale), the latter had chided his poet-journalist friend: “Do you think you can erase your birthmark by mocking your Babu-ness?” Later, Guha regretted the remark. One who could say, “I was born a Babu, but the life of a Babu is intolerable for me,” had reached a state of alienation which was, in fact, the generative source of the critical imagination. Indeed, Guha himself, in some of his rare autobiographical musings,

recalled a few moments from his childhood when he had felt the same stress of alienation. He had noticed, for instance, that elders in his family would refer to his village playmates as children of the praja (tenants) and they in turn would call him the munib’s (master’s) son. When the praja came to their house, they would never sit down and would touch the feet of even the children of the master’s family. Guha’s curious mind began, even at that early age, to ponder about the significance of these habitual practices of a hierarchical society.

Away from home

Ranajit Guha, the renowned historian, who passed away in Vienna on 28 April 2023, a month before he would have turned 100, was born in a village in East Bengal. He came to Kolkata at the age of ten to enter high school. By then, he had been introduced by his grandfather to the rudiments of Sanskrit grammar and the writings of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. At school, he encountered the poetry of Tagore. These would remain abiding intellectual resources throughout his life.

He entered Presidency College in 1938 to study History. Although the world now knows him as a path-breaking practitioner in the field, he did not initially set out to be a historian. Instead, he wanted to

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make history. He joined the students' wing of the Communist Party and became a prominent organiser. Soon, he left home to become a whole-time party worker. "My chosen life as a communist did not fit the family routine," he later remarked. His studies suffered. In 1942, he sat for the BA examination and barely managed to pass without an honours degree. Assigned to the party daily Swadhinata, he had no time to attend MA classes. Apparently, P C Joshi, the general secretary, intervened and persuaded Guha and a few other young comrades not to ignore their education. Guha passed his MA in History in 1944 with a First Class.

Living in Kolkata during those fateful years, Guha witnessed the Japanese bombings of the city in 1942, the wrenching scenes of hundreds of emaciated dead bodies lying on the streets during the famine of 1943 and the dreadful communal riots of 1946. The promise of a fresh dawn at independence seemed hollow. That year, Guha was selected to represent the CPI in the secretariat of the World Union of Democratic Youth in Paris. The next six years added a completely new dimension to his intellectual vision. Living in the Open City of Paris in the heady days of liberation from Nazi occupation, travelling in the socialist countries of Eastern Europe, making the journey by train across Russia as part of one of the first foreign delegations to visit China after the revolution, Guha acquired a first-hand knowledge of life within various communist parties of the world that was rare among Indian communists. That knowledge too would become an important lesson for him in later life.

The unconventional historian

Returning to Kolkata in 1953, Ranajit Guha combined his new occupation as a college teacher with his duties

at the editorial desk of the Communist Party daily. In 1956, when Soviet tanks entered Hungary to crush popular protests, Guha relinquished his party commitments and turned to historical research in the archive. In 1958, he joined the newly established History department at Jadavpur University headed by Susobhan Sarkar, his former teacher at Presidency College.

His research did not follow the conventions laid down by the guardians of the discipline. Turning to the landmark legislation of 1793 called the Permanent Settlement of Bengal on which countless tomes had been written, Guha posed a question no one had asked before. Physiocracy was an economic doctrine invented in eighteenth-century France that traced the source of national wealth not to foreign trade as did the mercantilists but to the products of the soil. It became a major economic instrument for the dismantling of the feudal system in Europe. How did that doctrine, applied to Bengal by East India Company officials seeking to create enterprising farmers, end up producing the neo-feudal monstrosity called the zamindari system of Bengal? Delving into those eighteenth-century debates, Guha showed that the unintended outcome was not brought about by the ineptitude of colonial officials or the mendacity of Bengal's zamindars. It was in fact a necessary consequence of the very historical logic of British colonial rule. "Reason is born spastic in the colony," he wrote. "A typically bourgeois form of knowledge was bent backwards to adjust itself to the relations of power in a semi-feudal society."

His novel approach did not find favour with economic historians of Bengal who discouraged him from writing a doctoral thesis on the subject. He began to publish the results of his research in the Bengali journal

Parichay, affiliated to the CPI. After a few instalments, he was asked to stop, apparently because the series was getting too long. Frustrated on all fronts, Ranajit Guha, in 1959, took up a fellowship at the University of Manchester to finish his thesis. It was printed and submitted to the Sorbonne in Paris for a doctoral degree and was turned down. Entirely by coincidence, a copy fell into the hands of Daniel Thorner, the American economic historian exiled in Paris because of the McCarthy investigations. Thorner contacted Guha and published the book in his series under the title *A Rule of Property for Bengal* (1963). It is now a classic of modern Indian history.

The peripheral academic

Guha found a job at the University of Sussex where he would spend the next two decades. He was a diligent teacher but shunned academic conferences and did not publish in academic journals. In 1970-71, he spent a year in India with the intention of writing a book on Gandhi. The aftershocks of Naxalbari were shaking university campuses in India. "I supported the violence of the Naxalbari movement because it was a warning to communists who were sliding down the slope towards a corrupt parliamentarism," he later reminisced. Guha returned to England

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with an entirely new project in mind: an analytical history of peasant revolts. The book would appear a decade later as the *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983).

In the meantime, he wrote some trenchant criticisms in *Frontier of the Indira Gandhi regime*, its torture of political prisoners, extra-judicial killings and the brutalities of the Emergency. On the intellectual front, he organised a group of unknown young scholars into an editorial collective and launched the series *Subaltern Studies* which became a landmark in modern South Asian studies. "The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism—colonialist elitism and bourgeois nationalist elitism", Guha announced in the first volume published in 1982. Historians of the former school believed that modern institutions were the gift of Britain to India and that nationalist politics was nothing but the squabble of parochial leaders for the loaves and fishes of government patronage. On the other hand, nationalist historians argued that a dormant Indian people was roused to patriotic consciousness by the leaders of the Indian National Congress. Challenging both views, Guha and his associates showed that the subaltern classes of peasants, workers, forest dwellers and other oppressed groups possessed an autonomous political consciousness. They had their own reasons for joining the movements launched by elite leaders, just as they often refused to join. Sometimes, after joining a movement, they withdrew. *Subaltern histories* were not reproductions of elite history; they had a structure and logic of their own.

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An untimely celebrity

Subaltern Studies created a stir among historians of India. A lot of the reactions were negative. "Let a hundred flowers bloom", Guha responded, "and we don't mind the weeds". Surprisingly, the series was received much more appreciatively in academic circles abroad, not only among historians but among anthropologists and literary scholars too. Even more striking was the fact that the enthusiasm was not confined to those who studied South Asia as their regional specialisation. *Subaltern Studies* came to be discussed for the novelty of the critical questions it raised about colonialism as a constitutive part of Western modernity. It became, from the 1980s, a significant feature of a new field called *Postcolonial Studies*.

Guha had, in 1982, retired from Sussex to take up a fellowship at the Australian National University in Canberra. The reception of *Subaltern Studies* brought Guha out of his self-imposed obscurity. He began to lecture and attend conferences at universities all over the world. He explained the relevance of the questions raised by him and his associates not just for India but for an understanding of relations of dominance and subordination everywhere. He warned against the simplistic view that colonial rule was founded solely on violence. No system of rule could endure without eliciting a certain degree of consent from the subordinate classes. In a long essay called "Dominance without Hegemony" (1989), Guha argued that there were two distinct idioms of politics that were intertwined in colonial India: one was British and the other precolonial Indian. The coercive laws of the colonial state were justified by a combination of the British concept of order and the Indian notion of *da??a* or punishment, while persuasion took the form

of a mix of the liberal idea of improvement with that of dharma or right conduct. For the subaltern classes, obedience was expressed in the idiom of *bhakti* (devotion), whereas rightful dissent took the form of protest against the violation of dharma. Guha made the important point that peasant resistance in colonial India was not derived from liberal notions of right but from the duty to protest against the *adharma* (wrong conduct) of the ruler. But in India under British rule, coercion always outweighed persuasion. Consequently, colonial rule was a dominance without hegemony. He extended the argument to assert that the ruling classes of independent India too had failed to achieve hegemony, since there was frequent and overt use of violence to maintain their dominance.

Good riddance to history

In 1989, after bringing out six volumes of *Subaltern Studies*, Guha stepped down from his position as editor of the series. He also retired from the university. Ten years later, he and his wife Mechthild settled down in an apartment in a suburb of Vienna. Now, through the 1990s, in lectures delivered in different parts of the world, he seemed to travel well beyond the boundaries of history to reflect in brilliant prose on some of his favourite authors—Charles Dickens, Anton Chekhov, Joseph Conrad, George Orwell. In 2000, in a series of lectures at Columbia University later published as *History at the Limit of World History* (2002), Guha declared that the truth of human life was not to be found in history which was necessarily built around the life of the state. That truth was stored in literature which depicts changes in the everyday existence of ordinary people—something that he, following the philosopher Martin Heidegger, called *historicality*.

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Guha was always extraordinarily sensitive to the nuances of language. His incisive analysis of text, ritual and folklore was strongly influenced by a close study of structural linguistics. Not only was he a superb stylist himself, in both Bengali and English, he was also a remarkably careful reader and listener. Asked how he had developed his elegant English style, he confessed that he had never written more than three or four pages of continuous English prose before he embarked on *A Rule of Property*. "It's probably because I read a lot of English literature as a schoolboy. I read every book in my father's library". But, he insisted, he always thought in Bengali, even when was required to write in English. As age caught up with him and ill health prevented him from travelling, Ranajit Guha, living in quiet seclusion on the edge of the Vienna Woods, immersed himself in a mental world to which he believed he truly belonged—the world of Bengali literature.

He stopped writing in English and instead, between 2007 and 2014, published five books and around a dozen essays in Bengali on literary and philosophical topics. He wrote on Bankim, Tagore and more recent poets. In several pieces, he reflected on episodes from the Mahabharata. It was an astonishing achievement for a man in his eighties. Most of these writings echoed his final realisation about the futility of political solutions to the troubles of human life. In his book *Prem na pratarana [Love or Betrayal]* (2013), Guha looked back at Vidyasagar's retelling of the story of Sita's banishment in which Vidyasagar, on behalf of his countless Bengali readers, accused Rama of betraying his innocent wife in order to placate his powerful courtiers who had unjustly blamed Sita of infidelity. Bankim, in a bristling riposte, had reminded Vidyasagar that Rama was

only following his duty as a king for whom rajadharma must take priority over marital love. In this debate, Guha's sympathy was entirely with Vidyasagar.

In another poignant piece where Guha emphasises the senselessness of political contest, he recounts that harrowing scene from the little discussed *Stri Parva* of the Mahabharata where, at the end of the eighteen-day war, the battlefield of Kurukshetra is strewn with the bodies of dead soldiers. Jackals and vultures are feeding on them. Moving between the corpses are the Kaurava women, looking for their husbands, brothers and sons, weeping and cursing those who had taken away their loved ones. "All wars come to an end", says Guha. "What doesn't end is the cycle of mourning and recrimination." That scene from the Mahabharata reminds us that, despite episodes of indescribable cruelty, human beings can reclaim the sentiments of mercy and compassion to restore their faith in a mutually supportive social life.

In these late writings, Ranajit Guha travelled far from his youthful convictions about a life given wholly to politics. But then, he had also shown, at several critical junctures in his career, a predilection to move away from a course that had turned conventional and sterile. After Samar Sen passed away in 1987, Guha, in a tribute to his friend, said, "The life an intellectual in our ill-fated country is blessed with the dignity of humanity only when it is agitated by the April storm, prolonged by conflicts among the people and made complex by the whirlpool of alienation—when, in other words, it can find no peace."

Guha's incisive, capacious, restless mind has now come to rest. For us, he has left behind a treasure house of ideas that scholars will explore for years to come. □□□

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THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The Divided World and a Fragmented Mind

I Satya Sundaram

THE 102ND ANNUAL CONFERENCE of the Telugu Federation, The Theosophical Society, was held on the theme 'Who am I in this Divided World' at Ananda Theosophical Lodge, Tadepalligudem-534101, West Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh, on 25th & 26th February, 2023. The Federation President was Mr K S Ramachandra Rao and the Federation Secretary was Mr P Raghu Rama Rao. The host Lodge President was Mr K Pandu Ranga Rao, and the Lodge Secretary was Mr D Narasimha Rao.

The word theosophy means Divine Wisdom—knowledge dealing with the evolution of the world and man's endeavours towards progress and perfection. The stress is on harmonious relations. An attempt is made to understand the Supreme Power behind nature. Theosophy is easily understood and rationally accepted. Also, whatever theosophy says need not be final. Truth will come out with experience and experimentation. Theosophy strongly believes in universal religion and universal brotherhood.

The Three declared objects of the Theosophical Society are:

- To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.
- To encourage the study of Comparative Religion, Philosophy and Science.
- To investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man.

Theosophy lays emphasis on harmonising all branches of knowledge which should not be studied in

isolation. It tells people life has a meaning and purpose. The quest for wealth beyond a stage proves calamitous. People have to respect divine laws. There is fear of death because people do not want to disown all they have acquired (N C Ramanajachary: Why Theosophy? Department of Studies, Indian Section, Theosophical Society, Varanasi, p, 11).

Madame Blavatsky (1831-91), the Chief Founder of Theosophical Society, in her article, "Practical Occultism", made a distinction between the theosophist and the practical occultist. According to her, a theosophist is one who loves pure and unselfish life, finds more joy in helping others, sacrifices his pleasure for the sake of others, loves truth, goodness and wisdom for their own sake, not for the benefit they may confer (article by Tim Boyd, The Indian Theosophist, September 2020, p, 384).

Annie Besant (1847-1933) said the attitude of the theosophist would always be that of a learner in life. She declared that the man who did not use his talent was the worthy of heaviest punishment (The Theosophical Life and the Three Gems of Theosophy. The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Chennai, p, 3).

Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986) had observed that discrimination should be made between the right and the wrong, the important and the unimportant, the useful and the useless, the true and the false, the selfish and the unselfish (The Theosophical Life, p, 26). He also declared: "Do not accept a thing because it has been accepted by many. He believed fundamental changes can

be brought about only through a transformation of consciousness (foreword to the book, On God). Also, one can realise truth only when one keeps the mind completely free. According to him, mind management is important. Regarding education, he observed, "The purpose of education is to cultivate right relationship, not only between individuals, but also between the individual and society (J. Krishnamurti: Education and the Significance of Life. P, 34).

At the Inaugural Session, Mr Shikhar Agnihotri, international Speaker, The Theosophical Society, Adyar, Chennai, has underscored the need for maintaining a sound physical and mental health. He regretted that people are capable of creating divisions. Even in the name of religion, wars are going on. He also said mind control has been neglected.

Mr S Venkateswara Rao, Telugu Federation Lecturer, spoke on "The Scientific Perspective of Theosophical Society". He pointed out that the modern world is divided, not scientifically but mentally, in terms of attitudes and human values.

Mr G Subrahmanyam, Vice-President, The Telugu Federation, delivered a lecture on "Theosophy Breaks All Barriers". Theosophy can dispel delusions and illusions because it strongly believes in universal religion and universal brotherhood. The theosophist has to cultivate a learning mind and a helping mind. All the barriers to mental maturity can be easily eliminated.

Dr A I Basavaraj Reddy, Former President, Rayalaseema Theosophical Federation, spoke on the theme "Fragmented Mind- Universal Mind". He also emphasised on comprehensive education which gives importance to both technical skills and soft skills.

Mr B Durga Prasad, Secretary, Srikrishna Paramatma Lodge, Kaviti,

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delivered a lecture on "Responsibility of man in this divided world." Most people are interested in rights and privileges, not responsibilities. Man is insouciant to environment, and behaves irresponsibly. Hence, the world witnesses natural calamities, loss of soil fertility, desertification and climate change. Gandhiji said nature is kind enough to meet everyman's need, not everyman's greed.

Mr K V Gopalakrishna, Secretary, Rajahmundry Divyajnana Samajam, gave a lecture on "The responsibility of Man in this Divided World". Man is capable of changing the world. Yet, he is reluctant to direct the world in the right direction.

There was a Lecture on "Realising the Relationship" by Mr Shikhar Agnihotri, National Speaker, The

Indian Section, Varanasi. Man cannot live in isolation though each one has his own or her own experiences. Meditation is no doubt necessary, but it should be taken up in a healthy environment. The aim is to dispel negative thinking. Also, service may be of many kinds. In need not be in the form of money.

Ms Gowri, Programme Announcer (Retd), All India Radio, Chennai, has delivered a Lecture on "Unity in Diversity". She said India is known for unity in diversity. People of different religions and cultures live together peacefully. Of course, now and then, fissiparous forces raise their ugly heads. People should preserve and promote unity in diversity. She also observed that modern technology (for instance, computer) has reduced bur-

den on man and enlarged his vision. But, the new technologies should be handled carefully.

Ms M Lakshmi, National Lecturer, spoke on "The Role of the Mind in Discovering Truth". Managing mind is very important. Mind is responsible for both pleasure and pain. A fragmented mind is not able to realise truth. Man is not able to serve the society because of the feeling of "I".

The Conference underscored the need for revamping Lodges by enhancing membership, and by involving the youth in the activities of the Lodges. It drew attention to the role of theosophy in the context of a fragmented mind and a divided world.

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REVIEW ARTICLE

Kashmir After 370

Joydip Ghosal

A DISMANTLED STATE, THE Untold Story of Kashmir After Article 370' (Harper Collins India) by prominent journalist Anuradha Bhasin searches the answer of a question throughout the book. How would the political and geographical alterations interact with daily lives of ordinary folks of Kashmir and what did the future hold up for this truncated region? This beautifully crafted book brought to the fore multilayer facts that remained obfuscated due to the lack of will to probe fairly and diligently. Anuradha aptly describes the book as a journey. It tried to discover how the reading down of article 370 and resultant legal actions and their ramifications altered the entire landscape in unprecedented manner changing the identity, economics, politics. The abrogation of already hollowed-out article would usher in a new dawn—government proclaimed. But the

populace of the region would find out in utter astonishment that their universe was turned upside down. Information system was in disarray. As a permanent resident of Jammu Kashmir she witnessed many turbulent upheavals post 5th August, 2019. She found herself after the abrogation at crossroads where her existence lay in tatters. She felt a sense of disempowerment. In order to express her predicament she took resort to the poem of Indu Killam. 'Building bridges for years/tired and hopeless now, for the river changed its course and the bridge leads nowhere...' Beneath the official narrative of Kashmir, post abrogation of article 370 lay buried deafening silence. It was like a cloak that muzzled unheard sounds that were reflective of myriad dimensions of political and social structures. A population with their aspirations remained numbed.

Unable to put her mind in order she sought the company of living legend Krishan Dev Sethi, a veteran crusader of 'Quit Kashmir Movement. 'On 5th August 2019 he was the only surviving member of JK constituent assembly. He was grief stricken. He had drafted the constitution of the state but it had lost its meaning and essence. He felt that the outcome of J&K's land reforms would render meaningless. Anuradha Bhasin asked him whether the 'land reforms could have been possible without J&K's special status, and he replied in negative.' It was no doubt that the conditions mentioned in the Instrument of Accession were recognised by article 370. Author presented a curious fact that in the Constituent Assembly debate on Article 370 dissenting vote was cast by Maulana Hasrat Mohani, one of the founders of Communist Party of India. He was not against granting the special status to Kashmir. He was in favour of similar structure of autonomy for all other states. That befitted his idea of federalism.

A C Michael, former member of

Delhi Minorities Commission remarked "A very dangerous precedence set by the present government for future governments. This is an emergency of another kind." On 22 March 2021 Modi Government tabled GNCT (Amendment Bill). In the words of Mrs Bhasin he 'did a Kashmir on Delhi.' Now the lieutenant governor would have powers to bypass any law. Elective representative would be reduced to mere heads.

She elaborately discussed the process of filing the petitions in Supreme Court challenging the scrapping of the article. She posed a pertinent question. Could the resultant delay in adjudicating a matter related to fundamental rights is truly deemed as justice? On 3 February, 2021 cyber-bullying reached another level. The law enforcing agencies started registration of citizen as volunteers. They would monitor the activities on internet and conduct surveillance. 'Unlawful content flaggers' would identify online illegal content. It was blatant violation of rights where mechanism of verification and authentication was absent. After 5 August, 2019 the valley itself metamorphosed into a prison. A PUCL report 'Imprisoned Resistance' documented the accounts of sleeplessness and panic of common people due to night raids.

The ban on communication and stringent curbs triggered a sense of insecurity among the working journalists. The author literally dis-

mantled the centre's normalcy narrative by presenting the cases of journalists Qazi Shibli, Peerzada Ashiq and Naseer Ahmad Ganai. The muscle-flexing methods of subduing the journalists transitioned from one lockdown to another due to Corona lockdown. Stringent UAPA was slapped upon photo journalist Masrat Zahra. Auqib Javeed had to face horrific ordeal for the title of his article. Fahad Shah, editor of Kashmir Walla had to face criminal charges. Two more journalists Manan Dar and Sajad Gul were arrested on terror charges. On the last day of August 2019 senior journalist Gowhar Geelani stood at the immigration centre of Delhi's International Airport. Deutsche Welle offered him a job. But he was disallowed to travel. In June 2022 photo journalist Sannalrs had Matto was disallowed to travel Kashmir for a prestigious photo exhibition. An independent journalist Aakash Hassan was debarred from boarding a plane for a reporting assignment to Srilanka. On 17th April 2021, Saima Akthgtar, a special police officer was grilled and faced the dreadful UAPA because she questioned frequent army raids at her village Frisal in Kulgam. Press Club's building was forcibly shut down. To make the matter worse Kashmiri journalist Qurat-ul-Ain's photo was uploaded on BulliBai App to tarnish her image by wrongdoers. Kashmir's media policy the fifty- page document which the au-

thor castigated as reflecting Orwellian policy judged journalist on 'barometer of unwavering loyalty to the government'. The situation resembled 'panoptic control' where those who raised their voices were likely to be prosecuted. This book also minutely discussed every aspect of new land laws and property rights and how they dispossessed local people.

Even political leaders were not allowed to speak up. The author with her poignant writing style brought to the fore how Congress Spokesperson Ravinder Sharma was taken away from the party office at Shaheedi Chowk in Jammu. After 5 August the valley remained insulated for several months. Rahul Gandhi was detained at the airport. Sandeep Pandey, prominent Magsaysay awardee was barred entry.

According to author today Kashmir finds itself drained of hope and it stands at the critical juncture of impending doom. The author raised the question with accuracy. Lack of clarity coupled with deafening silence deepened the all-pervasive fear. Was a new definition of democracy being thrashed upon J&K where military lockdown silenced the common people? She began each chapter of the book with pertinent quote. This quote by eminent poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko 'when truth is replaced by silence, the silence is a lie' brought to the fore and encapsulated the true essence of the book by tearing apart the official narrative of normalcy. □□

CLIMATE MIGRANTS

From Bay of Bengal to Arabian Sea

Sukanta Sarkar

BHAGYADUL PARA. AGE 42. Residence: Poila Gheri, Mousuni Island. Son of a fisherman family. From his childhood, he started fishing with his father sometimes in the sea or in the creeks of the

Sundarbans. He could not sit for the school leaving Madhyamik examination. At first their house was on the bank of Muriganga. The sea has been rising for a long time. Muriganga entered Bhagyadul's house overnight.

Books, dishes, bed sheets all went under the water. Mud house of his grandfather's time was washed clean. Then? Then what else! They moved back further into the island and somehow bought a small parcel of land and built a mud house again. Bhagyadul was 15-16 at that time. He used to go to fishing with his father every day. However, managing the family became difficult. Earlier,

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there were not only houses on the bank of Muriganga, but also several bighas of land nearby. Cultivation was not bad there. Bhagyadul's parents and uncles brought home even some money by selling vegetables. All that land went to Muriganga's stomach long before they left the house. As his father grew older, Bhagyadul used to go to fishing with his uncles. But, running the family started getting difficult with every passing day. About twelve or thirteen years ago. Some of the islanders went to Kerala for fishing job as contract workers. They returned to the island on vacation. After hearing from them about fishing in the Arabian Sea in a big trawler in Kerala and knowing the amount of remuneration, Bhagyadul decided that he would also go to Kerala. Then he went to Kerala for fishing job.

Once a year he returns home for fifteen days. Send money home every month. Now through online. Things were not bad. Already many others from this island have gone to Kerala or Tamil Nadu for fishing or other work like Bhagyadul. Two years ago, when Corona surged, Bhagyadul returned home along with more than 200 migrant fishermen of Mousuni Island after burning a lot of firewood from Kerala. On his way back, he decided to build a boat with what little savings he had and spend the rest of his life on this island, fishing not in the Arabian Sea but in the Bay of Bengal. After spending a few days back on the island, just when Bhagyadul began to work on building the boat, news came that a storm was coming. And they were forced to take shelter in the old school building in the village; they were left alone after the houses were destroyed. The whereabouts of the tin of the roof in the house was not found. Along with the force of the storm and heavy rain salt water of the sea entered the island and de-

stroyed everything. After the storm subsided, Bhagyadul's family found themselves in the same situation as thousands of other unfortunate residents of the island. After a few days, Bhagyadul started building a boat and a house with the money he saved. After three months, Bhagyadul contacted the owner of a trawler in Kerala over phone and arranged to go to Kerala again.

Bhagyadul is not alone; thousands of migrant fishermen or migrant workers like him have been forced to leave Mousuni Island. They are the children of this Mousuni island in the lap of the Bay of Bengal. It is as if the fortune-tellers do not believe that the unknown and familiar sea is coming to swallow them today. The land is gone. The house is broken, rather vanished. However, when talking about home while working on a fishing trawler in the Arabian Sea, this island haunts Bhagyadul in down memory lane.

Today Mousuni is sinking. Many people know it. Although less before, lately, frequent reports about drowning monsoons are also noticed in newspapers or on TV screens. The residents of Mousuni also know that the island is sinking. Mousuni is quite a big island. People on the seaward side of the island are more affected. Unfortunately they are leaving the island. The sons of their family are migrating to other states in search of work. Being forced to leave the traditional occupation they are choosing new occupation. However, their own permanent address is still this sinking island. They think that even if a small part of such a large island is submerged, the rest of the island will be covered with a small piece of land. So, wherever they go to work, Bhagyaduls want to come back to their island.

In order to understand why the people of this island are becoming migrant workers, one can look at the

overall situation of the island. The island is rapidly sinking due to rising sea levels. Due to storms and rains, saline water of the sea enters the island and destroys the cultivable land. It is destroying fresh water fish in the pond. Thousands of people have lost their land and homes near the sea and become refugees—they are climate refugees. Many of these internally displaced persons somehow find little land to build mud houses with tile or tin roofs in seemingly safer places inside the island, but find no land to cultivate or any other new livelihoods on the island. So, they are forced to move elsewhere. Most of them prefer to go to South India especially Kerala, Tamil Nadu or Andhra Pradesh for work mainly because of higher wages. Migrant workers in various states of the Deccan, be it fishermen or construction workers or any other profession, no one cares about staying at their place of work. Almost everyone wants to save some money and come back home. The most amazing thing is that even knowing that the island is sinking, these migrant workers still want to save up and build a house on the island, planning or dreaming of starting a 'small' business here. But, Mousuni's reality says otherwise. Even today, the main form of transportation on the island is motorised boats or country boats. However, intra-island communication is now highly touted. Lately, around 70 Resorts have been built legally and illegally on the Sea beach which is in the Mauza Baliara of the island, which has opened a new way of income for several people in that area. However, most of the whales remain where they were. In the meantime, it cannot be denied that some people are getting a small business opportunity due to the increase in tourist traffic. However, tourism has yet to make a significant impact on the island's overall economy. Tourism is going on,

tourists are going from Kolkata too, but needless to say, there is no future for the tourism industry in Mousuni Island. Because the Bay of Bengal is encroaching, Mousuni is sinking and Mousuni will continue to sink, oceanographers and environmentalists are making it clear.

'It will take at least 50-60 years or more for this island to sink' said Ramakrishna Mandal in his mid-fifties, a resident of Bagdanga near

Chinar River and Deputy Head of Mousuni Gram Panchayat. Also, he acknowledged their limitations in developing the island. He said with some regret, 'Actually, everyone knows that this island will not exist one day, so no one, at any level, comes forward to make any long-term plans for us.'

Meanwhile, the population of Mousuni is also increasing. There is no income in the island. So, people

are leaving the island every day. The island's fishermen are becoming migrant workers. The number is increasing. Recently, the former Sundarbans Development minister of the state, Kanti Gangyopadhyay, said in an interview, 'There is no young boy in the Sundarbans anymore.' Everyone is moving to another state as a migrant worker. The reason is simple: Mousuni no longer offers them job and hope. □□□

LETTERS

Distortions of History

The Indian History Congress from its very foundation nearly nine decades ago has remained committed to pursuing the cause of providing an accurate and comprehensive portrayal of the history of this country. It has, therefore, been greatly alarmed by the changes in the History syllabi and textbooks that have recently been effected by central official agencies, leading to a plainly prejudiced and irrational perception of the past.

The University Grants Commission in the draft syllabus it has framed for the Bachelor's course for History, claims for India the "honour" of being the Aryan homeland, deems the Epics as possible historical chronicles and excludes all reference to caste system in its ancient India portion. In fact, it expressly treats the caste system as an institution arising after the coming of Islam. The Mughal emperor Akbar along with his policy of religious tolerance between various religions is totally excluded from the syllabus. The students in the Bachelor's course would not thus learn of any cultural or intellectual developments of the Mughal era (neither Kabir, nor Tulsidas nor Abul Fazl)!

Now the same process of misrepresentation has been introduced in the prescribed History textbooks by omitting whole sections, along with individual passages and sentences (or parts thereof) in the prescribed textbooks. These include wholesale omission of the narrative of the

Mughal dynasty which gave India political unity for such a long period, and sundry other deletions of statements that are held to be inconsistent with the narrow communalist formulations favoured by the present regime. Even the narrative of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination has been trifled with.

The Indian History Congress recalls its own effort twenty years ago when it published a volume assessing critically the History textbooks then published by NCERT, pointing out their various errors and misjudgments. They were subsequently withdrawn.

It is now necessary for all historians, loyal to the rational and scientific nature and purpose of their profession, to stand up and make it clear that such distortions of History as the NCERT has now sought to spread through its deletions and revisions are simply unacceptable.

Professor Kesavan Veluthat
President, Indian History Congress [Former Professor, DU]
Prof. Syed Ali Nadeem Rezavi
Secretary, Indian History Congress [Prof. of History, AMU]
Blue Lady Story

By every rule in the book, this ship (Blue Lady), carrying asbestos waste and radioactive elements, should not be in Indian waters, let alone be beached. And yet, despite well-premised objections, the central government persuaded the Supreme Court to rule that Blue Lady be dismantled at Alang, Gujarat.

Two related judgments in the matter of ship-breaking and hazard-

ous waste were issued by the Supreme Court. The Division Bench of Justice Dr Arijit Pasayat and Justice S H Kapadia delivered both the orders. This was the same Bench that was seized with the Le Clemenceau case. The first order is a general order on the issue of ship-breaking. The second order was with specific reference to status of the Blue Lady (formerly SS Norway)—a ship with known dangers: asbestos and radioactive material, and without clear papers—currently beached at the Alang shipyard in Gujarat. This order gave a go ahead to dismantling of the Blue Lady.

Dismantling the Blue Lady exposes the mostly Bhojpuri and Oriya speaking causal and migrant workers and the villagers of Bhavnagar panchayats near Alang to toxic exposures. It also threatens their source of livelihood—fishing due—to marine pollution. By the government's own admission—a report of technical experts on ship-breaking—the underground water in Alang is heavily polluted. The ship-breaking industry is already known to have a higher accident rate (2 workers per 1000) than the mining industry (0.34 per 1000). This is considered the worst in the world, and 16 percent of workers here are suffering asbestos related diseases.

In its order on, the Honourable Supreme Court advanced "The concept of "balance" under the principle of proportionality applicable in the case of sustainable development?" and ruled that: "It cannot be disputed that no development is possible without some adverse effect on

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the ecology and environment, and the projects of public utility cannot be abandoned and it is necessary to adjust the interest of the people as well as the necessity to maintain the environment. A balance has to be struck between the two interests. Where the commercial venture or enterprise would bring in results which are far more useful for the people, difficulty of a small number of people has to be bypassed. The comparative hardships have to be balanced and the convenience and benefit to a larger section of the people has to get primacy over comparatively lesser hardship."

The bench granted permission for the dismantling based on the submission by Gopal Subramaniam, the Additional Solicitor General, to the effect that the ship does not have any more radioactive material and beaching is irreversible. But contrary to the recommendations of the Technical Experts Committee on Hazardous Wastes relating to Ship-breaking, Gujarat Pollution Control Board, Gujarat Enviro Protection and Infrastructure Ltd, (GEPIL) and the ship's current owner Priya Blue Shipping Pvt Ltd., the ship does contain radioactive substances at thousands of places.

Gopal Krishna

Less than Minimum Wages

The hike in the wages for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has failed to enthuse the workers in Kerala.

The wage has been hiked from Rs 311 to Rs 333 for Kerala, while the wage for Haryana has been increased to Rs 357. The minimum daily wage in Kerala is Rs 727 as compared to Rs 395 in Haryana and Rs 220 in Gujarat.

The Kerala Samsthana Karshaka Thozhilali Union (KSKTU) affiliated to the All India Agricultural Workers Union (AIAWU) has condemned the meagre hike and demanded the union government fix the wages in proportion to the minimum daily wage prevailing in each state.

Though the wage has been increased by Rs 22, the KSKTU termed the hike as insufficient and very low. "This hike of daily wage to Rs 333 is very low considering the daily wages ensured in the state". The daily wages in Kerala are the highest in the country and the KSKTU has been demanding a proportionate wage hike for MGNREGA workers.

"This small revision for Kerala is another discriminatory approach of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government at the centre."

Neelambaran A, NewsClick Turkey's Kurds

Turkey's third-biggest political party is undergoing a rebrand and the fallout could influence the outcome of the forthcoming election. The Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), a left-wing bloc co-chaired by Pervin Buldan that represents most of the country's 20 million Kurds, is facing legal closure weeks ahead of national elections on 14 May. All of its current deputies could be banned from running for office. So the HDP is entering the ballots with a new list of candidates, under a new party name: Green Left. Stickers and leaflets printed with the new logo are piled in the party offices in Diyarbakir, the largest city in Turkey's Kurdish region.

This is a game of cat and mouse that Turkey's Kurds have grown used to. Successive Kurdish parties have been repeatedly banned and reopened in new forms since the military coup of 1980. The HDP is the most successful: in June 2015 it became the first Kurdish-rooted party to win 10 per cent of the national vote, therefore allowing its MPs to enter parliament (the threshold was reduced to 7 per cent last year). That deprived Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party of its outright parliamentary majority for the first time. Erdogan now accuses the HDP of supporting terrorism. But by banning the party from the parliament, where it currently holds 56 of 600 seats, he would boost his own control over the chamber. If the HDP were to be

dissolved after its deputies were elected to parliament, the seats left vacant would be distributed among other parties, according to the ratios they already hold.

The HDP doesn't want to risk it. By running under a different banner, it is hoping to sidestep a court case. The Green Left is projected to take about 10 per cent of the vote and, as it isn't putting forward its own candidate in the presidential race, the party can support the main opposition hopeful, Kemal Kilicdaroglu. By trying to force the Kurds out of politics, Erdogan might be anointing them the kingmakers.

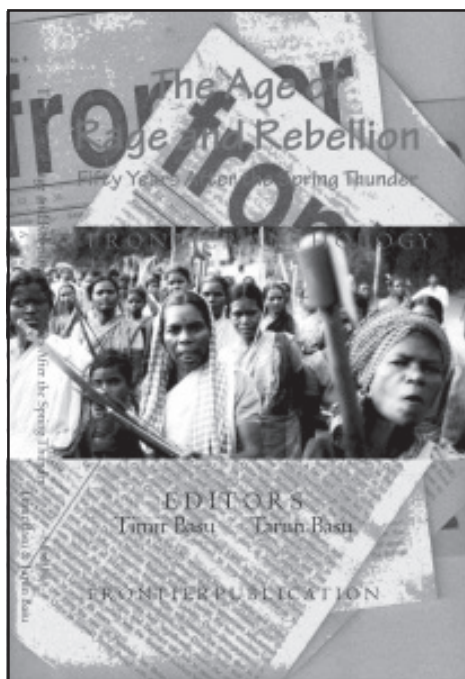
Hanna Lucinda Smith, Monocle 'Confusion'?

"I read with interest the angry outburst against me by Farooque Chowdhury in FRONTIER of April 16-22, where he accuses me of 'skipping a few facts, and creating a bit of confusion', and also suspects that it may not be possible for me to have an anti-imperialist stand..., with so much confusion. May I request Farooque Chowdhury to read two earlier articles of mine: (i) 'Leftist response to the War in Ukraine' (November 1, 2022) and (ii) 'Shades of the Past and Portents of Things to Come,' (November 18, 2022), both of which were carried by the news portal Countercurrents ? In these articles I detailed the 'facts'-US and NATO complicity in the war in Ukraine, the emergence of the neo-Nazi armed group Azov Battalion which is being used by the Ukraine government to fight Russia, as well as the other 'facts' about Russian atrocities on the common people of Ukraine. If he reads these articles, with a little bit of patience, he may find answers to the allegations that he has raised against me. I request the readers of FRONTIER to re-read my article 'Emerging reconfiguration of geopolitical forces', which provoked Farooque Chowdhury to come up with his strongly worded rejoinder. Let them compare the two articles, and arrive at their own judgment as to whether I deserve his criticism."

Sumanta Banerjee, Hyderabad

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