

frontier

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Now 'Quota within Quota'

ONCE AGAIN THE OPPOSITION EXPOSED ITS UTTERLY DIS-united face in the recently held Vice-Presidential election. Jagdeep Dhankar, a former West Bengal Governor got 528 votes against opposition candidate Margaret Alva who somehow managed to have just 182 votes. In a sense it revealed the future alignment in the coming parliamentary polls in 2024. Biju Janata Dal (BJD), Janata Dal (United), YSRCP, BSP, AIADMK supported NDA candidate Dhankar while the Aam Admi Party (AAP), Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and Telengana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) voted for former Congress minister Alva and strangely the Trinamul Congress (TMC), true to its opportunistic political exercise, abstained from the vote. In other words TMC helped Dhankar win the election smoothly though he had always been the main target of TMC's attack because of his alleged partisan role from the governor's office. In parliamentary gambling strange bedfellows are so common that people don't bother about it. With their electoral fortunes diminishing the Opposition gets further fragmented dashing the hope of a grand alliance against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The BJP is a master player in horse trading, rather donkey trading. After Maharashtra they are now trying to recreate the Shinde syndrome in Jharkhand and Bihar. The reason is simple: the party in power always has advantage of manipulating the outcome of elections.

But the BJP is brilliantly successful in articulating the art of 'divide and rule' to gain extra-mileage in electoral politics while the Opposition miserably fails to combat its nefarious design. Having failed to win the hearts and minds of Muslim voters they are now trying to divide the Muslims on caste lines. The Pasmanda issue vigorously pursued by the BJP threatens to snowball into the Muslim community's Mandal moment. Only the other day the BJP OBC Morcha national president K Laxman demanded a 50 per cent reservation for the Pasmanda community in Muslim institutions such as Aligarh Muslim University, Jamia Millia Islamia and Hamdard. Muslims too are divided on caste lines. So politics of caste-based reservation has immense scope in parliamentary culture. Caste is such an all pervasive ailment that no religion in India can get rid of it. Low caste is not a Hindu-only phenomenon; in India it affects Sikhism, Christianity and Islam as well. For the Muslims it appears to be a "quota within quota" episode. The Pasmandas are actually asking for a quota within the quota already in practice.

The hard fact is that the Pasmandas are around 80 per cent of the Muslim population. As in the case of the upper caste Hindus, most of the government jobs and college seats are cornered by just 15 per cent of upper caste Muslims or Ashrafs as they are popularly known. Sheiks, Sayeds, Mughals and Pathans rule while Ajlafs, roughly equivalent of Dalits are at the bottom of the pile. The bitter truth cannot be denied that caste discrimination is no less inhuman in the Muslim community. For one thing many low caste Muslims are possibly converts from the so-called low-caste Hindus. Ironically enough, they switched over to Islam to escape from the brutalities of Hindu upper caste people only to find themselves trapped in the same hell after conversion. Quite expectedly leading Muslim organisations like Jamat-i-

Islami rejected the idea of caste-based discrimination in Islam. As the BJP is interested in dividing the community on caste-lines the Pasmanda reservation movement is likely to gain momentum in coming days. The Mandalites in general are no less enthusiastic about the Pasmanda question as they see in it a new area to extend reservation agitation.

Caste is such an institution in India that no political party, left or right, can ignore it anymore. The communist left in India never took the caste factor seriously. Nor did they ever devise any appropriate programme to address the problem. In truth they never recognised caste oppression or for that matter the importance of Ambedkar in his crusade to annihilate caste. Ambedkar remained untouchable to the communists because of his 'pro-British

outlook'. They thought caste would automatically vanish with the progress of industrialisation and labour organising. No, that didn't happen. Caste prejudices continue to affect toilers. In many cases workers are no less caste conscious than their employers. The communists' attempt to equate caste with class never really took any concrete shape. Even in the same industrial establishment 'upper caste' workers are in permanent category but Dalits toil as contractual or casual workers. The country is likely to witness a new bout of quota stir; this time in a completely different setting. Caste annihilation is not on the agenda of any political party. What all they want is to create a creamy layer from the oppressed caste segments and keep the system as it is. But danger lies in BJP's dubious way of creating division among Muslims. □□□

COMMENT

China, Taiwan and America

AT THE TIME OF WRITING China is holding its biggest-ever show of military force in the air and seas around Taiwan, including the firing of ballistic missiles.

The military exercises followed a visit to the island by the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi.

China sees Taiwan as a breakaway province that will eventually be under Beijing's control again.

However, Taiwan sees itself as an independent country, with its own constitution and democratically-elected leaders.

China's President Xi Jinping has said "reunification" with Taiwan "must be fulfilled"—and has not ruled out the possible use of force to achieve this.

Taiwan is an island, roughly 100 miles from the coast of south east China.

It sits in the so-called "first island chain", which includes a list of US-friendly territories that are crucial to US foreign policy.

If China was to take over Taiwan it could be freer to project power in the western Pacific region and could possibly even threaten US military bases as far away as Guam and Hawaii.

But China insists that its intentions are purely peaceful.

The island first came under full Chinese control in the 17th Century when the Qing dynasty began administering it. Then, in 1895, they gave up the island to Japan after losing the first Sino Japanese war.

China took the island again in 1945 after Japan lost World War Two.

But a civil war erupted in mainland China between nationalist gov-

ernment forces led by Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong's Communist Party.

The communists won in 1949 and took control in Beijing.

Chiang Kai-shek and what was left of the nationalist party—known as the Kuomintang—fled to Taiwan, where they ruled for the next several decades.

China points to this history to say that Taiwan was originally a Chinese province. But the Taiwanese point to the same history to argue that they were never part of the modern Chinese state that was first formed after the revolution in 1911—or the People's Republic of China that was established under Mao in 1949.

The Kuomintang has been one of Taiwan's most prominent political parties ever since—ruling the island for a significant part of its history.

Currently, only 13 countries (plus the Vatican) recognise Taiwan as a sovereign country.

China exerts considerable diplomatic pressure on other countries not to recognise Taiwan or to do anything which implies recognition.

China could attempt to bring about "reunification" by non-military means such as strengthening economic ties. For one thing Taiwanese companies have invested hugely in China. And in Taiwanese investments the presence of American multinationals can hardly be ruled out.

But in any military confrontation, China's armed forces would dwarf those of Taiwan.

China spends more than any country except the US on defence and could draw on a huge range of capabilities, from naval power to missile technology, aircraft and cyber attacks.

Much of China's military power is focused elsewhere, particularly along the LAC in the Himalayas, but in overall terms of active duty personnel for example, there is a huge imbalance between the two sides.

In an open conflict Taiwan could at best aim to slow a Chinese attack, try to prevent a shore landing by Chinese amphibious forces, and mount guerrilla strikes whilst waiting for outside help.

That help could come from the US which sells arms to Taiwan.

Until now, Washington's policy of "strategic ambiguity" has meant the US has been deliberately unclear about whether or how it would defend Taiwan in the event of an attack.

Diplomatically, the US currently sticks to the "One-China" policy, which recognises only one Chinese government—in Beijing—and has formal ties with China rather than Taiwan. The Mao- Nixon parley that opened the Chinese economy to American corporates is now history.

But in May, US president Joe Biden appeared to harden Washington's position.

Asked whether the US would defend Taiwan militarily, Mr Biden replied: "Yes."

The White House insisted that Washington had not changed its position.

Relations between Taiwan and China appear to have deteriorated sharply following Ms Pelosi's visit, which Beijing condemned as "extremely dangerous".

China says its military exercises are focused on six danger zones around Taiwan, three of which overlap the island's territorial waters.

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Taiwan says the move, which will force ships and planes to find routes around those areas, violates its sovereignty and amounts to a blockade.

Tensions between China and Taiwan have been increasing and America is just aggravating them by making undesired provocation. □□□

[Contributed]

NOTE

Global Arms Business

Bharat Dogra writes:

ONE OF THE MOST PERPLEXING questions of human life on earth relates to why weapons capable of destroying all life on earth have been developed, accumulated and persisted with, particularly since year 1914 onwards. Nearly 13,000 nuclear weapons exist in the world today and the actual use of less than 0.5% of these can destroy human beings and most life forms on earth, not only directly by fire, heat and

explosion but also by setting in a nuclear winter that will deny sunlight, food and other essentials of life. With the escalation of tensions and enmity among the various nuclear powers, with the reduction of response time, with the increased possibility of misreading of situations and accidents, with the development of 'tactical' and smaller nukes, with the increasing possibilities of terrorists acquiring and even using these, with the increased risk

of proliferation and with stalemate or regression in disarmament talks and agreements, the possibilities of intended or accidental use of nuclear weapons and exchange of nuclear weapons is increasing. Dangers from actual use of chemical and biological weapons, robot weapons and space warfare also remain.

At the same time conventional weapons are also becoming more and more deadly, and depleted uranium weapons have already been used extensively in some wars, particularly in Iraq. The number of deaths caused by extensive and saturation point use of the most destructive conventional weapons has sometimes

almost equaled the use of a nuclear weapon or two, as seen in the Second World War, Vietnam and Iraq.

In fact even the actual destruction caused by various kinds of small arms, in small and big conflicts and crimes as well in daily life, is immense. The number of yearly deaths caused by small arms worldwide is much more than that caused by the use of the first atomic bomb in Hiroshima.

While the total number of people engaged in the production and distribution of these weapons worldwide is likely to be quite high, most of them are engaged in earning their bread and butter which they can also earn in other less destructive lines of work. The crucial decision makers, controllers and big profit earners constitute a much smaller group. Their number may be much less than a hundred thousand worldwide. Thus just about 0.001 per cent of world's people play a critical role in endangering the safety and security of the entire planet.

These persons, and particularly an even much smaller core group, benefit from and are engaged relentlessly,

even feverishly, in trying to create conditions in which more and more destructive weapons in increasing quantities can be produced, invented, 'improved', ordered, sold, tested and used. It is the daily business of these people and their success is measured by the extent to which more and more weapons with higher destructiveness are promoted and peddled.

A robber who indulges in some violence once in a while is jailed. But these persons who pursue daily the peddling of most deadly weapons, routinely employing deceit and deception, corruption and cunning, to maximise the spread of the most destructive weapons which will kill so many, are celebrated among the most successful people of high society, rubbing shoulders with famous politicians and officials.

The arms sales of the 100 largest arms and military service companies added up to 531 billion dollars in year 2020. 41 of these are in just one country, the USA, with annual sales of 285 billion dollars. Such big companies, if they are selling food products or textiles, have to reach

out to millions of consumers. But such companies selling arms for domestic use or exports have to engage with just a few politicians and officials to ensure their multi-billion orders. Hence they are both willing and capable of spending billions on election and selection of several politicians and officials. They can make and perhaps unmake governments or at least those sections of governments most relevant to them; they can ensure what war, invasion and arms export related decisions are actually taken.

Hence the constant activity of about a hundred thousand persons, with billions of dollars at their disposal, to increase destruction and conflict in world and to produce and procure the tools for this is a constant danger to the world's peace and security. Something effective must be done to check this completely irrational and in fact insane (yet ever continuing and repeatedly successful) pursuit of destruction. □□
[The writer is Convener, Campaign to Save Earth NOW. His recent books include *A Day in 2071*, *Planet in Peril* and *Protecting Earth for Children*.]

A PEEP INTO HINDUTVA ARCHIVES

The Saffron Brigade Betrayed 'August 9'

Shamsul Islam

ON THE EVE OF 80TH anniversary of the glorious Quit India Movement 1942 [QIM], people must evaluate the anti-national role of the Hindutva flag-bearers (who shamelessly claim to be the original nationalists) in India's anti-colonial freedom struggle. QIM also known as 'August Kranti' (August Revolution) was a nationwide Civil Disobedience Movement for which a call was given on August 7, 1942 by the Bombay session of the All India Congress Committee. It was to begin on August 9 as

per Gandhi's call to 'Do or Die' in his Quit India speech delivered in Mumbai at the Gowalia Tank Maidan (renamed as August Kranti Maidan) on August 8. Since then August 9 is celebrated as August Kranti Divas.

The British swiftly responded with mass detentions on August 8th itself. The contemporary official documents confirm that over 100,000 arrests were made which included the total top leadership of Congress including Gandhi, mass fines were levied and demonstrators were subjected to public flogging. Hundreds

of civilians were killed by police and army of the British rulers and their henchmen; native rulers. Many national leaders went underground and continued their struggle by broadcasting messages over clandestine radio stations, distributing pamphlets and establishing parallel governments. Innumerable patriotic Indians were shot dead for the crime that they were holding Tricolour publically. Even before that a terrible massacre took place in Mysore where the armed forces of Mysore Raja who was very close to Hindu Mahasabha and RSS shot dead 22 Congress activists for saluting Tricolour.

It is to be noted that after declaring Congress an anti-national and unlawful organisation, the British

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masters allowed only Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League to function.

People know that the then Communist Party of India opposed the QIM thus betraying a great phase of mass upsurge in the history of the freedom struggle. But it is well documented that despite CPI's call for keeping aloof from QIM large number of Communist activists participated in it. This aspect of history is conveniently side-tracked. However, what role the then Hindutva camp—consisting of the Hindu Mahasabha [HM] and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh [RSS]—played in the QIM is under wraps for reasons unknown. The Hindutva camp not only opposed QIM but also provided multi-faceted and multi-dimensional support to the British rulers in suppressing this historic mass upsurge. In this connection, shocking documents are available.

While addressing the 24th session of the Hindu Mahasabha at Cawnpore (now Kanpur) in 1942, Savarkar outlined the strategy of the Hindu Mahasabha of co-operating with the British rulers in the following words:

“The Hindu Mahasabha holds that the leading principle of all practical politics is the policy of Responsive Co-operation. And in virtue of it, it believes that all those Hindu Sangathanists [members of HM] who are working as councillors, ministers, legislators and conducting any municipal or any public bodies with a view to utilize those centres of government power to safeguard and even promote the legitimate interests of the Hindus without, of course, encroaching on the legitimate interests of others are rendering a highly patriotic service to our nation. Knowing the limitations under which they work, the Mahasabha only expects them to do whatever good they can

under the circumstances and if they do not fail to do that much it would thank them for having acquitted themselves well. The limitations are bound to get themselves limited step by step till they get altogether eliminated. The policy of responsive co-operation which covers the whole gamut of patriotic activities from unconditional co-operation right up to active and even armed resistance, will also keep adapting itself to the exigencies of the time, resources at our disposal and dictates of our national interest.” [Italics as in the original]

This ‘Responsive Cooperation’ with the British masters was not only a theoretical commitment. It soon got concretised in the ganging up of Hindu Mahasabha with the Muslim League. Hindu Mahasabha led by ‘Veer’ Savarkar ran coalition governments with Muslim League in 1942. Savarkar defended this nexus in his presidential speech in the same session of Hindu Mahasabha at Kanpur, in the following words:

“In practical politics also the Mahasabha knows that we must advance through reasonable compromises. Witness the fact that only recently in Sind, the Sind-Hindu-Sabha on invitation had taken the responsibility of joining hands with the League itself in running coalition Government. The case of Bengal is well known. Wild Leaguers whom even the Congress with all its submissiveness could not placate grew quite reasonably compromising and socialable as soon as they came in contact with the HM and the Coalition Government, under the premiership of Mr. Fazlul Huq and the able lead of our esteemed Mahasabha leader Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerji, functioned successfully for a year or so to the benefit of both the communities.”

Hindu Mahasabha and Muslim League beside Bengal and Sind ran coalition government in NWFP also during this period.

Following the Hindu Mahasabha directive to co-operate with the British, the present Hindutva icon, Dr Mookerjee assured the British masters through a letter dated July 26, 1942. Shockingly, it read:

“Let me now refer to the situation that may be created in the province as a result of any widespread movement launched by the Congress. Anybody, who during the war, plans to stir up mass feeling, resulting internal disturbances or insecurity, must be resisted by any Government that may function for the time being”

The second-in-command of the Hindu Mahasabha, Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee, also the deputy

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chief minister in Bengal Muslim league ministry in a letter to Bengal governor on behalf of Hindu Mahasabha and Muslim League made it clear that both these parties looked at the British rulers as saviours of Bengal against Quit India Movement launched by Congress. In this letter, he mentioned item-wise the steps to be taken for dealing with the situation. It read:

"The question is how to combat this movement (Quit India) in Bengal? The administration of the province should be carried on in such a manner that in spite of the best efforts of the Congress, this movement will fail to take root in the province. It should be possible for us, especially responsible Ministers, to be able to tell the public that the freedom for which the Congress has started the movement, already belongs to the representatives of the people. In some spheres it might be limited during the emergency. Indians have to trust the British, not for the sake for Britain, not for any advantage that the British might gain, but for the maintenance of the defence and freedom of the province itself."

The other flag-bearer of Hindutva, the RSS, was not different in its attitude towards the QIM. It openly sided with its mentor 'Veer' Savarkar against this great revolt. The RSS' attitude towards the QIM becomes clear from the following utterances of its second chief and most prominent ideologue till date, MS Golwalkar. While talking about the

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outcome of the Non-Cooperation Movement and QIM he said:

"Definitely there are bound to be bad results of struggle. The boys became unruly after the 1920-21 movement. It is not an attempt to throw mud at the leaders. But these are inevitable products after the struggle. The matter is that we could not properly control these results. After 1942, people often started thinking that there was no need to think of the law."

Thus, the prophet of Hindutva, Golwalkar, wanted the Indians to respect the draconian and repressive laws of the inhuman British rulers! He admitted that this kind of negative attitude towards the QIM did not go well even with the RSS cadres:

"In 1942 also there was a strong sentiment in the hearts of many. At that time, too the routine work of Sangh continued. Sangh vowed not to do anything directly. However, upheaval (uthal-puthal) in the minds of Sangh volunteers continued. Sangh is an organisation of inactive persons, their talks are useless, not only outsiders but also many of our volunteers did talk like this. They were greatly disgusted too."

It would be interesting to note what Golwalkar meant by 'routine work of Sangh'. It surely meant working overtime to widen the divide between Hindus and Muslims thus serving the strategic goal of the British rulers and Muslim League. In fact, the contemporary reports of the British intelligence agencies on the QIM were straight forward in describing the fact that RSS kept aloof from the QIM. According to one such report, "the Sangh has scrupulously kept itself within the law, and in particular, has refrained from taking part in the disturbances that broke out in August 1942".

These historical documented facts make it clear that Hindutva gang

led by the RSS not only betrayed QIM but also rendered great service to the British masters by aligning with the Muslim League when the foreign rulers were faced with the nation-wide popular revolt by the Indians. They in collusion mounted one of the fiercest repressions of the freedom fighters. Shockingly, this gang is ruling India today describing itself as a symbol of Indian nationalism. We need to convey these facts to the Indians so that these traitors are exposed and charged for crimes committed against India.

The RSS/BJP rulers know that betrayal of the QIM by their Hindutva ancestors cannot be covered up. It is crystal clear that RSS including its top leaders like Golwalkar (head of the RSS), Deendayal Upadhyaya, Balraj Madhok, LK Advani and KR Malkani who were RSS whole timers during QIM did not participate in this Movement or any other struggle launched for the freedom of India. RSS-BJP rulers continue raking up communal polarising issues so that betrayal of the QIM is covered up. □

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TRAVESTY OF JUSTICE

Fascism in Action

Sumedha Pal

ACTIVISTS, AUTHORS, LAWYERS, among other civil society members on July 22, came together under the banner of 'Save Adivasis, Save Constitution' to decry the Supreme Court's recent order to impose a fine on activist Himanshu Kumar and to recommend to the Chhattisgarh government to press criminal charges against him.

Addressing a press conference in Delhi, Bhim Army Leader Chandrashekhar Azad; Chattisgarh-based activist Soni Sori; authors Nandini Sundar and Arundhati Roy; and lawyer Prashant Bhushan described the order as a "travesty of justice".

On July 14, a two-bench of Justices Pardiwala and A M Khanwilkar dismissed a petition by Chhattisgarh-based activist Himanshu Kumar and 12 others seeking a probe into alleged brutalities by security forces during anti-Naxal operations in 2009. The alleged massacres had taken place on September 17, 2009 and October 1, 2009 at Gachhanpalli, Gompad and Belpocha villages in the Dantewada district.

The apex court charged Kumar with a fine of Rs 5 lakh, describing the allegations by petitioners as "false charges". It also instructed the Chhattisgarh government to act against the petitioners for "criminal conspiracy".

Kumar in his petition had stated that in 2009, 16 tribals were "murdered" by the police and security forces at Gompad. Among those killed were women, children and elderly people, and the fingers of a one-and-half-year-old boy were chopped. Kumar had filed petitions in as many as 519 cases of alleged

atrocities, including rape and loot by the police.

'Will not pay fine, even if I have to go to jail'

Speaking at the press conference, Kumar said that he will not pay the fine levied on him even if meant if had to go to jail.

"Those who are demanding the truth and justice are being targeted and apprehended. A war is on. The state is fighting its own people. Are the troops there to protect Adivasis? They are there to capture resources for the rich. This is a full-fledged war on Adivasis – it is a hidden war of India. Gompad is one such case."

Continuing further, he said, "The court has said that six people had not recognised who the killers were. Police had kidnapped these people in cars without number plates. If the police are kidnapping someone and threatening to shoot them, keep them in for six months and then forced them to give statements... Why is the court not investigating and why should someone who has filed the petition pay a fine? This is not a decision of the court, this is a decision of a judge who is scared of the government."

"If I pay the fine, it will mean that the petition was wrong and Adivasis were wrong. Adivasis will come to Delhi and ask the Supreme Court to answer to those people who have lost their lives," he said.

Lawyer Prashant Bhushan, critiquing the judgment said, "This is an absolutely ridiculous judgment, and a false case has been filed against the activist who in fact highlighted the issue. This pattern of imposing fines is the use of arbitrary power. Those judges who want post-

retirement jobs are being lured to subjugate the judicial process. These are serious threats to the independence of the judiciary. Our constitution, high courts and the Supreme Court are watching as spectators as the democratic fabric of the country is being violated.

The independence of the judiciary is crumbling, bending down to the whims of the government. We must protest against this judiciary, every time this happens."

A series of interviews of the witnesses in the case, as reported by The Hindu in 2010, alleged that on October 1, 2009, uniformed men stormed the village. They fatally stabbed and shot three men, three women and a 12-year-old girl, and cut off a two-year-old infant's fingers. The reports also corroborated Himanshu Kumar's and the witnesses' accounts of the petitioners missing.

Speaking at the press conference, activist and author Nandini

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by
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Sundar pointed out that several benches of different courts have raised questions about the functioning of the police.

“Despite so many questions, victims have not been compensated and no FIR has been filed against the officials responsible. In 2022, the police will be told that they are absolutely correct. This is contempt of people and Himanshu Kumar and the Supreme Court itself.

The benches are saying that they have no faith in the previous benches

of the Supreme Court. Chhattisgarh Police is absolutely correct. The court is asking Teesta Setalvad and Zakia Jafri questions, a woman who saw her husband hacked in front of her is being accused of keeping the pot boiling. Our contempt case against the machinery is pending. The question is who is wasting whose time? I have no respect for this,” she said.

Activist Soni Sori said, “People in Bastar are being killed. They are being encountered. Our women are still being raped. Who will give us our

lives and our time back? Be it the Congress or the BJP. We are being labelled as Naxals when we fight for our rights. This is not about the money; this is about weakening the fight for Adivasis. People from Gompad are ready to come to Delhi. We will come and meet the president.”

The activists stated that Adivasis will be coming to Delhi to register their protest against the order of the Supreme Court in the coming weeks.

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[Courtesy: *The Wire*]

AMERICAN PROVOCATION

Finally Pelosi in Taiwan

Farooque Chowdhury

MRS NANCY PELOSI, Speaker, US House of Representatives, had a play in Taiwan, which in its initial phase was not dignified.

The play's initial phase was like a Hide-and-Seek game: no public announcement about Taiwan visit and the planned visit's time schedule; none definitely knew the Taiwan trip-plan, and then, her plane made an adventure like detour to the east before turning the plane's nose towards Taiwan; and the landing was in the dark, the moments after her getting out of the plane was in the dark. She and the persons near the plane's stair were hardly visible as one light, probably from a torch light, was focused to the ground. The entire scene was like a part from a detective-novel.

It was not a befitting scene for the 3rd-top most state leader from the most powerful state. China was neither going to bombard the moments of landing of her plane nor throw flame in front of her plane that took off from a South Asian country, as China neither plays stupid nor a kid. Rational minds don't base plan on irrational imaginations.

Her initial moments in Taiwan made it a comic.

The play's main part, then, was exposed: It was a provocation to China. An incitive move it's.

Taiwan is China's part. This is a fact recognised internationally. The 3rd top most leader's country recognises the fact. Not only recognition, the country has reiterated the fact a number of times.

Can it so happen that that fact is questioned by the country's 3rd-top most leader? Then, is there no cohesion in the state machine in the country? Shall anyone having knowledge about state machine accept the argument?

What is the state of the state machine if that is the fact—one part of the machine moves to this way while another goes the opposite?

Third or Fourth World countries are considered underdeveloped in many terms including organisation of state machine. How many countries from this group experience this mode of functioning?

If the fact—opposite moves by different parts of the most powerful state machine—is accepted as an argument, then, many serious and

significant questions related to the state, and its declarations, pledges and commitments will surface. Questions related to the state's trustworthiness and reliability will also come up. Even, its lieutenants and proxies around the world will search answers to the questions, if not publicly, but earnestly. They'll turn confused.

The state will damage its public reputation, also. It may happen that the state considers itself so powerful that it doesn't bother about reputation. Or, it is well aware of its image already in public mind—commitments not kept, definitions formulated arbitrarily and self-conveniently. Whatever it's, it doesn't benefit the state, ultimately.

However, there's no reason to draw conclusion that the state's condition has rotten down to that state where the state's different parts move towards different directions, where an important part of the state machine doesn't bother about another important part's commitment.

The state's government for a number of times has affirmed One China policy. Now, another part of the state shows it doesn't care about that affirmation.

Who is nullifying whom? Is it turning out as a comic? What would have the state said if similar incident happened in another state? Hasn't

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the state said, a few days ago, the Taliban in Kabul are not going by the accord signed in Doha?

This argument will not expose the Taiwan play. It's an exposure of the state. So, it can be left aside now as the main plot of the play is to be seen closely.

The Empire needs tension and confrontation in the Asia-Pacific. With a charged situation, the Empire likes to build up its rationality for its increasing military presence in the area. So, there's the provocation in Taiwan. The Pelosi-White House style is 'I play good-you bad'.

Moreover, the Empire likes to build up a chain of citadels around China. It's required to contain China. So, there's the Taiwan-play.

In addition, China's forward journey is to be disturbed: Keep China engaged with a confrontation.

These led to the Taiwan-provocation by Mrs Nancy Pelosi, who was identified in a derogatory way by a group of citizens of Taiwan. The citizens were protesting her Taiwan tour.

But shall China step into that trap? There's no reason that will lead China to that trap. China's history of political decision making doesn't tell the practice of stepping into provocations. The country's development—emergence as the world's second largest economy—doesn't tell its habit of playing with provocations. It follows a policy of strategic patience.

But, China means its utterances. Its history also tells this.

One major difference between the Empire and China is there's no lobbyist playing politics in China. So, its plans and decisions on politics and war, on strategy and tactics, on policies and practical steps are not driven by lobbyists. The opposite is a well-known fact in the Empire. One is strength while the other is a weakness. This has been

proven a number of times on the world stage, in a number of wars. There're some well-documented histories related to this also, including of Chiang Kai-shek days.

Mrs Nancy Pelosi's Taiwan play turned not only provocative, but nasty as it denies sovereignty of a country—China. The Monroe Doctrine and its corollary are known to all: The Empire considers a vast region of the world as its inner-yard; the Empire doesn't like anyone other than itself there. Not only that region, the island-countries in the Pacific also be mentioned as the Empire's concern: China's friendly relations with those countries, an agreement with one of the countries, weren't taken easily by the Empire. Rather, the Empire and its ally Australia jumped there to keep the countries in its camp. It's a recent development. China's economic ties with the Latin American countries are not taken easily by the Empire.

Now, one leader from a state is infringing sovereignty of China!

Shall the empire let similar incident happen in its sovereign territory, may be a far away island or a chain of islands, or in any territory of any of its allies? Shall India or Pakistan allow, as for example, this happen in parts of Kashmir the two countries control? Shall Japan allow the same in Okinawa or Indonesia in one of its islands? What's with Turkey and the Greek Cypriots? What's about Serbia position on Kosovo? No country shall willingly allow it.

Now, one leader from a state is asking China to do the opposite—accept violation of sovereignty.

But, the Empire's playbook has some wrong assumptions; and one of those is regarding China. This wrong assumption was in the days-gone-away also. Its White Paper on China after the Mao-led Revolution is one of the evidences of wrong assumptions.

Today's China has passed away its Kuomintang-ruled days. That China has gone away in 1949. Then, Mao came, and told about imperialism—Paper Tiger.

The people, more than a billion, there in China have made great strides—its space-steps are enough to tell about its advancements. Its leadership is a show of its development: No comical character or a Bo Jo-like character emerges there. The country can't be cowed down now.

A faction of the ruling classes in the Empire considers this fact while another faction ignores it. That's a difficult condition for the Empire. The Taiwan-play may be a part of that factional fight. A few voices in the Empire have already questioned: What's the advantage gained with this Taiwan-provocation?

Furthermore, the world is changing. In the past days, it's difficult to find an instance of someone from an empire, especially an aggressive empire, apologising to the empire's dependent. But this has happened recently. That dependent is not standing as a dependent today.

So, it's easy to assume China's position—strength, not weakness, use tactical options, don't play stupid. China-Taiwan trade volume shouldn't be forgotten—a tactical option to China. China will go by its tactical options, which will not be easy for its competitor to swallow. Already the option of military drill around Taiwan has started playing a heavy role on international shipping, consequently global trade.

With this reality, the provocation coupled with the comical arrival-minutes in Taiwan shall stand as an ugly attempt to violate China's sovereignty over Taiwan. □□□

For Frontier Contact

DHYANBINDU

College Square

THE IDEA OF MANTO

Remembering the Writer of 'Toba Tek Singh'

Takshi Mehta

SAADAT HASAN MANTO, born on May 11, 1912 in Ludhiana in British India, is an enduring literary icon and one of those few people that both India and Pakistan see as their own. India claims him because he lived here for the better part of his life, 36 years to be precise. Pakistan also claims him because after the Partition he migrated to Lahore and lived there for seven years until he took his last breath there. However, in reality, Manto belonged nowhere, even whilst his art is poignantly treasured on both sides of the border.

After the Partition, when he moved to Pakistan, his heart yearned for his precious Bombay (now Mumbai), the place he had called home all along. Within a span of a year, his life was altered completely and, ironically, while the world would know him as an icon claimed by both Pakistan and India, Manto himself suffered the agony of being displaced. Soon after he moved to Lahore from Bombay, he spiralled into depression and found solace in alcohol, which eventually became the cause of his death. Manto may have died eight years after the Partition, but it is no revelation that it was the Partition that killed him. Devastated and disappointed, Manto's loneliness in a foreign land that he couldn't call home engulfed him and sucked the life out of him.

Manto is a testament to the human tragedy that the Partition was and a reminder that it was not a political, religious or practical 'solution' as people on both sides of the fence are taught to believe. It was a heinous crime that went on to become not only one of the greatest

human tragedies in history, but also one of the most prolonged. After all, 75 years is a long time to suffer at the hands of an atrocity, but the Partition is a gift that keeps on giving.

Even today, religious polarisation, which was the foundation of the Partition, continues to poison the society. Kashmir continues to grapple with territorial disputes that the Partition has left as its legacy. Every day, as peace and security is threatened and disrupted; it is Manto who firmly reminds ordinary people not to get lost in statistics. He represents the agony of individual trauma and implores to mourn for singular losses because the only end to violence and hate is the ability to repent and regret, but if every catastrophe is measured by a number, then how fickle will a human life become?

Had Manto been alive today, what he would have said after looking at state of affairs in India and Pakistan? Possibly he would be anguished, just like he was then. On his 110th birth anniversary, people must celebrate the idea of Manto, the writer, his rebellion and unwavering legacy he left behind.

Manto was known as a Punjabi writer but he belonged to a Kashmiri family that had settled in Amritsar. He didn't write in Panjabi, but in Urdu and, therefore, he was also an Urdu writer. In 1936 he moved to Bombay, the only place he would ever call home. During the Partition, he migrated first to Karachi and then to Lahore in 1948. He wasn't very religious, but he was still known as a Muslim writer, an identity that forced him to move to the Muslim-majority country unwillingly because as he solemnly says in the film Manto by

Nandita Das, "itnamusal mantohoon ki mara jasakoon (I am Muslim enough to get killed)".

So, then who was Manto? If one calls him an Indian, he was also a Pakistani. If one calls him Punjabi, he was also Kashmiri, with the streets and corners of Bombay also an integral part of his identity. Manto would have preferred to be all of this, but in the society he lived in such identities that are complex and inclusive in equal parts are frequently frowned upon. He threatened conformity and the establishment when he was alive and continues to threaten it even today through his legacy, which is why rereading Manto in a contemporary light in a crumbling society is imperative.

Today divisive politics is more rampant than ever and in such a situation, Manto symbolises all the things that do not get along well with the establishment. The easiest way to rule for the establishment is to categorise people in different brackets that are reductive and convenient. However, Manto fails to fall into these brackets, not just because of his complex identity, but also because of his radical choices and work. That said, divisive politics is crude and intransigent and seeks to box people in the barricades of "us" and "them" and all who challenge the status quo naturally fall in the latter category. It is no surprise that Manto was tried six times for obscenity, thrice in British India and thrice in Pakistan. He was never convicted.

Manto's work, primarily short stories, is known to be gut-wrenching and disturbing. They are not just a commentary of the times he lived in, but also of the broader 'human failings' as Naseeruddin Shah puts it, and that is why it is painstakingly relevant even today. Partition is a common theme in most of his works, such as 'Toba Tek Singh'.

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The story takes place two-three years after 1947 and focusses on the inmates of a mental institution in Lahore. Its main character, Bishan Singh, is a Sikh who is being sent to India, in an exchange of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims between Pakistan and India. Bishan Singh is from the village of Toba Tek Singh and is distraught trying to understand whether his home is in India or Pakistan. When a soldier tells him that Toba Tek Singh is in Pakistan, but he has to go to India because he is a Sikh, he defiantly stands in the no-man's land between the two countries and eventually dies there. Through 'Toba Tek Singh', Manto demonstrates how there's more insanity in the outside world than there is inside a psychiatric ward.

In 'Thanda Gosht' (cold flesh), a story for which he was tried for obscenity and pornographic content, he talks about how during communal violence a man named Ishwar Singh abducts a Muslim girl after killing her family and then attempts

to rape her, only to find out that she is dead.. Similar to most of his work, this story, too, dwells on how the Partition brought out the worst in mankind. Manto's work, whether 'Kali Salwar', 'Hattak', 'Khol Do', is mainly focussed on uplifting and acknowledging the trauma that the downtrodden go through every day. From prostitution and sexual perversion to religious discrimination and political propaganda, Manto held up a mirror to society, a sight that many squirmed at. However, as Manto believed and often said, if his writings reeked of obscenity and impropriety, then it was only because reality was worse.

Alas, Manto's India isn't all that different from contemporary India that still finds itself rooted in the same prejudices and mindsets. Which is why reading Manto today teaches you to challenge authority and the status quo whenever it's needed. It also tells you that as a species we've always sought ways to discriminate, and that hate is the easiest of human emotions. Had

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

—Fr.

Manto been alive today, he would have turned 110 years old, and he remains an integral part of both India and Pakistan's cultural landscape. He lives on through his readers, who attempt to make sense of their reality today by diving into the discourse of the past as documented by him.

"Hindustan had become free. Pakistan had become independent soon after its inception but man was still slave in both these countries—slave of prejudice, slave of religious fanaticism, slave of barbarity and inhumanity", writes Manto. A man with love in his heart and compassion in his pen, Manto is a reminder to the best of people, and the worst of people to be empathetic humans.□

[Courtesy: Frontline magazine]

POST-PARTITION MIGRATION

How Anti-Communist Operations Triggered the 1950 Riots

T P

THE SECOND WAVE OF post-Partition migration in Bengal was actually triggered by anti-communist counter-insurgency measures taken by the Pakistani security agencies in the wake of a renewal of the Tebhaga movement in 1948. The first one of its kind took place in May 1949 in Nachol in Rajshahi district, where the Santhal peasants were the main supporters of the communists. Brutal police action led to violent Santhal retaliation and more repression. This resulted in the first wave of Santhal migration into the adja-

cent Murshidabad district, triggering counter-violence on the Muslims in this West Bengal border district. Then on 20 December 1949, another incident occurred in a Namasudra village called Kalshira in Chitalmari Union of Bagerhat subdivision in the district of Khulna. When a police party came to Kalshira in search of a few communists, they were resisted by the villagers and this resulted in the death of one police constable. Two days later, a larger police force, assisted by Ansars and other elements, attacked not just this one but twenty-two other

neighbouring villages inhabited by 'Hindu Namasudras'. They began to flee in panic and by 10 February, there were 13,000 refugees at the Sealdah station in Calcutta recapitulating their horror stories of violence, suffering, and privation for an incensed Calcutta press and an irate Hindu public.

However, there are multiple narratives of these incidents. According to a press statement of the Pakistani Prime Minister, the Kalshira incident did not immediately lead to any widespread violence; it was well contained by the timely and effective intervention of the district administration. Nothing happened for about two weeks until on 15 January, the Indian Deputy Prime Minister Vallabhbhai Patel came to Calcutta and gave a provocative speech reminding the Bengalis of what had

happened to them a few years ago in Calcutta and Noakhali. Then from 18 January, the Calcutta Press and the Hindu Mahasabha picked up the Kalshira story and began to publish inciting reports and statements, which led to the outbreak of riots in the border districts of West Bengal, leading to the exodus of Muslim refugees. This, according to him, led to violence against Hindus in East Bengal. In other words, he made Sardar Patel and the aggressive Calcutta press responsible for inciting the riots and considered what happened in East Bengal as purely 'retaliatory'.

The Indian Deputy Prime Minister, of course, rejected this version of the events and also the allegation. If one reconstructs the timeline from other sources, the Kalshira incident was first reported in Calcutta by Amrita Bazar Patrika on 30 December 1949. The Deputy Prime Minister, during his Calcutta visit on 15 January 1950, did not mention this incident at all. The Statesman on 21 January reported the arrival of the first group of 500 refugees from Khulna. On 25 January, Ashutosh Lahiry, the Chairman of the Parliamentary Board of

the Hindu Mahasabha, issued a press statement describing the incident as 'something like a "miniature Noakhali"', affecting the marshy tracts inhabited by the Namasudras. It was, in his opinion, 'carefully planned' and was part of 'a deliberate conspiracy to wipe out the Hindu population' of the region. On 1 February, Lakshmikanta Moitra, the MP from the border district of Nadia, reported the incident to the Indian parliament, noting that retaliatory violence had already started in Murshidabad, and Prime Minister Nehru promised to probe into the situation. The press reports in Calcutta hereafter increasingly became belligerent and inciting.

As the stories of atrocities appeared in the Calcutta press and the exaggerated statements of the Hindu Mahasabha leaders, emotions in West Bengal boiled over and full-scale anti-Muslim riots started on 8 February, after a gap of nearly two years. It affected Muslim majority areas in the north and central Calcutta and soon spread to the industrial areas of Howrah and parts of Hooghly. In Muslim-dominated localities, their lives and properties were targeted. Their houses were set on fire; shops were looted. In Howrah, trains were stopped in search of Muslim passengers, and the violence that was unleashed reminded of what happened in Punjab in 1947-48. The state government quickly deployed the army.

This saved lives, but properties were lost, as local security personnel was also reported to be complicit in the mass violence. As the Muslims did not feel safe, they began to flee; by the beginning of 1951, about 700,000 of them had fled to East Bengal.

However, what was undeniable about the riots of 1950 was the element of retaliation involved in the assaults—the Pakistani Premier was

not entirely wrong, after all. As the Bangladeshi literary giant Anisuzzaman re-called, minorities on both sides of the border believed that the violence had been started on the other side because of causes that nobody knew. The outbreak of riots in West Bengal in February—which was in itself provoked by the incidents in Khulna—soon led to even more serious attacks on the Hindu minorities in large parts of East Bengal. Exaggerated news and rumours of Calcutta incidents first led to anti-Hindu riots in Dacca from 10 February, when the Chief Secretaries of two Bengals were still conferring in the city to resolve the crisis. In Dacca, Hindu properties were looted and destroyed, and then Hindu lives were threatened, allegedly by Mohajirs or Bihari Muslim refugees, according to government reports. But within two days, the violence spread to other districts, like Rajshahi, Noakhali, Chittagong, Faridpur, Khulna, Sylhet, Mymensingh, and then finally to Barisal. In Mymensingh, at Bhairab Bazaar Bridge, India bound trains were detained and Hindu refugees were singled out and killed—according to some reports, in thousands. The Barisal riot was perhaps the worst of its kind in terms of the ferocity of violence that was unleashed on the Hindus. Fuelled by a rumour that Fazlul Huq, the former premier of Bengal and a popular leader of Barisal, had been killed in Calcutta, angry mobs slaughtered thousands of Hindus. The victims of these riots were not the high-caste bhadrolok, as many of them had already left, but the Dalit and tribal peasants like the Namasudras and the Santhals. □□□

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‘শুধু পূর্বাশা’

সাদা জাগানো বাংলা পাক্ষিক পত্রিকা

ও ‘পূর্বাশা এখন’ মাসিক পত্রিকা

এখনই সংগ্রহ করুন

সব স্টলে পাওয়া যাচ্ছে। ‘শুধু পূর্বাশা’ দাম ৫

টাকা মাত্র ও ‘পূর্বাশা এখন’ ২৫ টাকা মাত্র।

‘শুধু পূর্বাশা’-এর বার্ষিক গ্রাহক চাঁদা ১৭০

টাকা। ‘পূর্বাশা এখন’-এর গ্রাহকরা অতিরিক্ত

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PHILOSOPHY OF NIRGUNBAD

Kabir and Ambedkar

Kanwal Bharti

[There are many similarities between Ambedkar and Kabir. Both were staunch opponents of Brahmanism and both opened the doors to growth and progress for the deprived. Both faced almost the same kind of challenges in their lives. Kanwal Bharti writes on what this means for the present.]

AMBEDKAR CONSIDERED three people his gurus and Kabir was the first and the foremost among them. Clearly, Kabir had influenced him greatly. But what in Kabir had impressed him? What role had Kabir played in shaping the personality of Ambedkar? It is said that Ambedkar's family was Kabirpanthi. He must have come to know about Kabir in his childhood. But it is difficult to say whether Ambedkar was introduced to Kabir, the saint or Kabir, the philosopher. It is also not clear whether Marathi translations of Kabir's works were available then. Kabir's complete works were first published in Hindi in 1930 under the editorship of Babu Shyamsundar Das. But it is more likely that Ambedkar was introduced to the questioning, philosopher Kabir through *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*, a book published by Macmillan, London in 1915, which contained 100 poems of Kabir translated into English by Rabindranath Tagore. When this book was published, Ambedkar was a student of political science in London. He was a voracious reader, always on the lookout for new books. Needless to say, this book must have had a profound influence on him.

But it wasn't just Kabir's philosophy that drew Ambedkar towards him. The most important reason for Kabir's appeal to Ambedkar was the identical social and religious ambiances of the times in which they lived. That was why Kabir's personality gave a new edge to Ambedkar's leadership abilities. Though 500 years

separated Ambedkar and Kabir, if a student of history carefully compares the situations prevailing in India in the 15th and 20th centuries, he will realise that things came full circle in these five centuries. It was as if history was repeating itself.

Karl Marx had said: "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force." Similarly, Kabir could see that the Mullahs and the Pandits were not only the ruling material force but also the ruling intellectual force of society. He understood that the people needed a new intellectual stream based on the principle "seeing is believing".

Kabir held dialogues with both the Mullahs and the Pandits, but to no avail. So, he turned to the principle of "neither Hindu, nor Muslim" and, negating both the religions, provided a revolutionary leadership to the people. He developed his own aesthetics, his own way of seeing religion and society, which was in sharp contrast to the worldview of the Quran and the Vedas and Puranas. He says that Vaishnav's deity is Raja Ram, who is an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, and so unacceptable to him. Kabir then came up with the revolutionary concept of "Nirgun" (attributeless) that militated against the belief in the Varna system and in the other world. He said, "Hamrajhagraranakou, Pandit, Mullah Chhodedohu." He realised that no revolution is possible without abandoning both the Pandit and

the Mullah. This aspect of Kabir's thought influenced Dr Ambedkar. In the 20th century, Dr Ambedkar was facing the same challenges that Kabir had faced in his time. That was why Kabir's concept of "seeing is believing" gave him the vision he was looking for. This third stream of criticism became the foundation of Bahujan thought and Kabir was undoubtedly its proponent. It formed the point of departure of Ambedkar's thoughts.

Kabir never accepted the Brahmin as his leader though the Brahmin considered himself the teacher of the entire world. At the time, this was the biggest revolution in the realm of ideas, and it touched Ambedkar deeply. Though Ramanand was no longer alive when Kabir lived, Ramananda's ideology was, and it had given rise to big mutts (monasteries). But Kabir attacked these mutts mercilessly and ensured that no "sagun" mutt of Dalits came into existence. This revolutionary step influenced Ambedkar. In the 20th century, treading the path of Kabir, Ambedkar too followed the principle of "na Hindu, na Musalman" and did not accept the leadership of anyone, including Gandhi. He attacked both the Hindu and Muslim establishments with equal ferocity. That was why he could caution the Dalits against accepting the leadership of either the Hindus or the Muslims.

Dr Ambedkar's quest for a religion that conformed to this belief ended in Buddhism. It was Kabir's logic and reason that led him to Buddhism. He could never develop respect for any Hindu saint. It was Kabir's Nirgunvad that took Ambedkar to atheism. Some may find this assertion unbelievable but it is true. Kabir's Nirgunvad may, on the surface, appear theological but in reality it is atheistic. It is the only

theology that rejects the concepts of Heaven and Hell, of rebirth, of salvation, incarnation, puja, pilgrimage and fasting and has no faith in any scripture. Which other theology does so? Kabir's Nirgunvad urges the people not to believe in fate and scriptures.

Nirgunvad influenced Ambedkar deeply. He discovered the same kind of logic in Buddha's philosophy, too. Kabir is present in Ambedkar's Annihilation of Caste speech from the beginning to the end. The irrefutable logic used in the speech by Ambedkar to attack the caste and the Varna system may make one feel that five hundred years on, Kabir was speaking in his new avatar.

"When the god does not have any varna, how can men have one?" Kabir would argue. Kabir said, what Buddha had said centuries earlier. When Ambedkar said that no caste is pure; when he said that there was an admixture of alien blood not only among the warrior classes—the Rajputs and the Marathas—but also among the Brahmins and so no one can be Brahmin or Shudra; when he said that Brahmins and the Untouchables belong to the same stock; was he not taking Kabir's arguments forward? When Ambedkar asked the Vedas and the Shastras to be destroyed with dynamites, was he not repeating what Kabir said to Brahmins "Ved-kitebchadideupande, ee

sab man kebharma". When Ambedkar criticised Hindu saints for saying that god and humans were equal but not raising their voice against the inequality between man and man perpetuated by the caste system, was he not echoing Kabir who said that one who had not given up his caste and Varna couldn't perform 'bhakti'.

Kabir never supported the spiritualism that considered this world an illusion and the other world as truth. There are two streams of philosophical thought in brahmanical spiritualism—Dvaitvad (Dualism) and Advaitvad (Monism). Dvaitvad argues that the soul and the Brahma are different while Advaitvad says that they are one. But both talk about the other world. It would be interesting to find out what Kabir's spiritualism was and to what extent it influenced Ambedkar.

For Ambedkar, social justice was the touchstone for any philosophy or spiritualism. This touchstone had three parameters—liberty, equality and fraternity. He had tested all religions—especially Hinduism—on this touchstone and discovered that not only Hinduism but also Islam and Christianity did not pass muster. His book *Philosophy of Hinduism* underlines this fact. Kabir's emphasis is on love. Without love, there can be no equality, no liberty and no fraternity. It was Kabir who

declared that it is useless being tall like a date palm, which does not provide shade to the passerby and the fruits of which hang too high to pick. It was Kabir who said, "Preme ko premi mile, tab sab vishamrithoyee." Only love can convert the poison inside a person into the nectar of life. Then, people will not only grieve for their dead but also for slaves—"Muon ko kyaroiye, jo apnegharjaye; roieyebandivan ko, jo hate hat bikay" (Kabir Granthavali, p 63). Kabir had no patience for people who were proud about Brahma and subjectivism but thought of humans not as humans but as Shudras and mlecchas.

Today, if Ram forms the part of names of most Dalits, it is because of the influence of Kabir and Raidas. This influence was so deep that "Ram" figured in the name of Babasaheb's father too. This "Nirgun" Ram of Kabir created a repulsion for the "Sagun" deities adorning Hindu temples. But who could predict that in the 16th century, Goswami Tulsidas, by hailing Thakur ji, would convert Kabir's Nirgun Ram into Sagun Ram and the moneybag patrons of Brahmanism would loosen their purse strings to promote it.

Ambedkar's critics might say that nowhere in his works he has quoted Kabir. But then, he has not quoted Phule either. But did he not consider Phule his guru? □□□

LETTERS

Khitaber Kuthi Story

About 1700 people reside in the Khitaber Kuthi—a village, where most of the villagers belong to Scheduled Caste (Dalit) and minority Muslim backgrounds. The village is located at about 200 metres from the border of India and Bangladesh, with limited infrastructural facilities. For instance, a primary school or a ration shop is located about 2 km away from the village. Most of the roads in the vil-

lage are not metalled and there are no irrigation facilities provided by the government. The primary occupation of the villagers is agriculture but due to the restrictions imposed by the BSF, their income has reduced to around Rupees 50 thousand per year and most of the farmers have started migrating to other parts of the country in search of jobs. There are approximately 140 acres of cultivable land situated outside the border fencing.

The BSF is posted beside the IBBR and controls the ingress and egress of the villagers into their agricultural fields through fencing gates. The BSF have illegally issued a customised ID proof for the villagers of Khitaber Kuthi – 1, which they have to produce in order to go to their own fields. In most of these fencing gates the ID issued by the government of India, like Aadhaar Card and EPIC are not accepted by the border guards of India.

Most of the villagers have been facing severe restrictions to cultivate their

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own lands and hence incurring grave financial losses. Due to lack of proper irrigation facilities in these areas, the villagers couldn't cultivate 'Boro' crops. Hence the only profitable option to cultivate in these areas are jute and corn. But the BSF personnel attached with 192 Battalion of Jhikri BSF BOP have put an embargo on the cultivation of these two crops in particular stating that the measure is to stop illegal smuggling activities in the border. It was figured that there is a huge difference in the profit margin between cultivating jute and paddy. A farmer earns around Rupees 3300 per acre while farming paddy but can earn up to Rupees 75 thousand per acre while cultivating jute. Their regular expenses as well as daily livelihood depends on this income.

The villagers, after getting to know from the newspaper that jute cultivation season has opened, have made all necessary arrangements like putting chemical fertiliser and preparing the field for jute cultivation. They have invested around Rupees 2000 each for cultivating jute. But as soon as they were about to plant jute seeds in their fields, the BSF personnel stopped them. They stated that jute crops beyond the fencing would boost smuggling activities in the village. Due to such illegitimate restrictions by the BSF, about 65 families are incurring heavy losses in agriculture.

Kirity Roy, Secretary
Banglar Manabadhikar Suraksha
Mancha (MASUM)

Communal Harmony

Muslim residents of Kursari Panchayat in Doda, Jammu and Kashmir set an example of communal harmony. They helped the people of the Hindu community in carrying huge idols to an ancient temple here. Six idols made of granite weighing 500 kg to 700 kg were procured from Rajasthan to be installed in the recently renovated Shiva temple on top of the mountain at Kursari, three kms from the Bhaderwah-Doda highway. Sensing the difficulty, Sajid Mir, sarpanch of Kursari panchayat not only allo-

cated Rs 4.6 lakh from the capital expenditure budget for road construction, but also asked 150 villagers from his community to help.

Mir said, "This is our culture and these are our values, which we have inherited. That is why we have not fallen prey to the nefarious designs of those who try to divide us on the basis of religion. Today we have again shown that we are all united." Over four days, people from both communities used machines and ropes to carry the idols to the temple, where they would be installed in a religious ceremony. Mir said, "It is really encouraging to see the response it is getting. Local contingents of the army, companies involved in road construction and civil administration also came forward and extended their full cooperation."

The Shiv Mandir Committee has also praised him for the cooperation it has received from the Muslim community in completing the work. Temple committee president Ravinder Pradeep said, "It is heartening to see the love and affection of our neighbours, they give us strength. We worked hard over the last four days to manage the transportation of the idols, which at one time seemed an impossible task." Haji Abdul Gani Mastana (75), a local resident, said, "I am very happy to see this. It is that our youth are beautifully carrying forward the ethos of communal harmony and mutual brotherhood."

Akash Mishra, Kashmir

The Cook is a Dalit

In a shocking case of caste discrimination, some 147 students at the Shri Sokhda Primary School at Sokhda village in Morbi district of Gujarat have reportedly stopped eating their midday meals, as it is being prepared by a Dalit woman.

According to a report by The Times of India, the 'boycott' has been happening since June 16, when Dhara Makwana, a Dalit woman began preparing the midday meals there.

The school has some 153 students, but 147 of them, who belong to OBC

communities such as Koli, Bharwad, Thakor and Gadhvi, have now stopped eating the midday meal.

Gopi Makwana, the husband of the cook said some parents told him that they could not allow their children to eat food cooked by a Dalit woman.

He has filed a police complaint after even the school authorities failed to convince the parent to let their children eat the midday meals.

School principal fails to convince parents

School principal Bindiya Ratnotar said she met with the parents to resolve the situation, but they were adamant.

"They do not want to abandon their casteist thinking. We can teach children not to have casteist attitudes and that all are equal and no one is untouchable. Sadly, we cannot convince their parents".

While it might sound shocking to many, this is not the first time such blatant discrimination has been reported.

In December 2021, it was reported that upper-caste students boycotted the meal cooked by a Dalit woman in Champavat district of Uttarakhand.

Sunita Devi, a Dalit was appointed bhojanmata, at a government-run secondary school in Jaul village in December 2021.

But some upper caste students refused to eat the midday meals prepared by her and some parents also accused the school of appointing a different person instead of the one originally chosen by them.

Later the school was forced to reinstate Sunita Devi after the intervention of Uttarakhand chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami.

In May this year, it was reported that some upper caste students had once again stopped eating the midday meal prepared by the Dalit cook.

Following this, Champawat District Magistrate Narender Singh Bhandari who met with parents warned them that students who are boycotting the meals could be expelled from the school.

Bobins Abraham

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