

# frontier

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## *Playing with Fire*

**P**EOPLE OF MANIPUR WANT PEACE. NO, PEACE REMAINS elusive, albeit rioting, burning and looting continue, notwithstanding deployment of security forces. Unlike the first Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee 22 years ago Prime Minister Narendra Modi had no time to issue an appeal to the people of Manipur to maintain peace and calm. He was busy to exhibit his Yoga skill before an international audience. The major attraction of the much publicised 9th edition of International Day of Yoga was that Prime Minister Narendra Modi led a mass Yoga demonstration at UN Headquarters, New York for the first time. The Hindutva brigade in America was enjoying the moment. Nine years ago he proposed the observance of International Day of Yoga in 2014. Meanwhile, his lieutenant Amit Shah failed to pacify the aggrieved and restore normalcy in the Manipur valley of death.

Since the ethnic violence broke out in Manipur on May3, "over 115 dead, over 50,000 displaced, over 121 churches of 15 denominations burnt down, house of even MOS for External Affairs has been torched besides destroying large number of government buildings". The BJP chief minister of Manipur downplayed it as an act of terrorists. But the army general Anil Chauhan said it had nothing to do with counter-insurgency and was primarily a clash between two ethnicities.

Home Minister Amit Shah found time to visit the strife-torn state only after 27 days after the massive death and destruction. Surprisingly, BJP national president J P Nadda maintained a stony silence as if nothing was happening. 'The best way to solve a critical problem is not to solve it'. Perhaps that is the philosophy of BJP.

Meanwhile, six student organisations from Manipur asked the central leadership of BJP to clarify its stand on the charge by a Kuki militant outfit that it helped the party in the 2017 Assembly Elections. Pitting one terrorist group against another is an old practice of the administration. The British did it and their brown successors follow the legacy because it serves their narrow political interests. People have forgotten the Khalistani syndrome and its background during the Indira Gandhi regime. The security agencies have been doing this dirty game in Kashmir for long. Intelligence departments, particularly RAW [Research and Analytical Wing] reportedly during the Naxalite upsurge in the late sixties and seventies penetrated the movement and created their own 'counter-revolutionary' cells to counter

revolutionary groups, politically and militarily. How some naxalites killed their fellow naxalites by dubbing them 'class enemies' is a black chapter in the glorious history of the India-shaking Rebellion. So it is not surprising that the ruling BJP will be using terrorist organisations. As per media report the chairman of United Kuki Liberation Front [UKLF] in a two-page representation to the union home minister Amit Shah on June 7, 2019, made the claim about helping the BJP in the 2015 district council polls, 2017 assembly polls and 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The UKLF and the union government entered into a suspension of opera-

tions [SoO] agreement in 2008. So it is difficult to dismiss the UKLF statement as baseless. After all the Centre didn't contradict the UKLF stance. A total of 24 Kuki rebel outfits were part of the SoO pact.

The clandestine arrangement reportedly involved Assam Chief Minister Hemant Biswa Sarma- convener of the North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) formed by the BJP and Rashtriya Swyamsevak Sangh (RSS) national executive member Ram Madhab.

The BJP bribed some militants to gain foothold in north east to show the world that it is truly pan-Indian while the grand old party Congress is

steadily losing its national status. The Kukis want a separate state incorporating all hill areas. The dubious game played by the BJP to buy peace and vote seems to be not working. The Congress party sought a National Investigating Agency (NIA) probe into the alleged deal while demanding repeatedly an all-party delegation to be sent to Manipur. But NIA is under home ministry and it is unlikely that they will go against their boss. Then an all-party delegation may gain some kind of political legitimacy through the exercise but the situation will remain supercharged unless they address the problem at its roots. □□□

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## COMMENT

### Everyday Imperialism

THE WAR IN UKRAINE HAS NOT only shaped everyday lives in Europe but also negatively affecting everyday lives of working people in Asia, Africa, Americas, and Oceania. It is weakening the working people by plundering their daily income. The imperialist conflicts and its expansionist wars are not only exploiting resources but also weakening the power of labour. It poisons the working class consciousness in the name of nationalism and territorial integrity. Such an inherent imperialist framework enables multinational imperialist corporations to expand profits at the cost of people.

The capitalist digital platforms help in shaping digital cultures, values, and productions, which are concomitant with the requirements of cultural imperialism via homogenisation, atomisation, and commodification of individuals, their 'needs and desires'. It helps in the dismantling of collective consciousness to reinforce power imbalances, as the dominant cultures exert influence over the less powerful ones, shaping per-

ceptions and norms to normalise and naturalise everyday imperialism. Such a project and processes of centralisation of cultural production of dominant values and ideas helps the monopoly capitalism to thrive. In this new phase of imperialism, everyday imperialism colonises consciousness and makes it compliant with the requirements of capitalism and its crony corporations.

This everyday imperialism is different but continues to carry the feature of other three different phases of imperialism since its origin in history. The first phase of imperialism did not end with the Second World War. It recycled itself as a neoliberal economic project with the help of globalisation but continue to use its traditional methods of wars and conflicts. It destroyed peace, stability, secular and constitutional and electoral democracies in Latin America, Middle East, and different parts of Asia by forming alliance with authoritarian political leadership. It often formed partnership with terrorist organisations and dic-

tatorships to destroy democracy and capture regional resources in the peripheries. The second phase of imperialism is marked by inter imperialist rivalry. However, the inter-imperialist rivalry ended with imperialist collaborations with the establishment of organisations like European Union. The imperialist partnership between Western Europe, ex-Soviet States and other puppet regimes led by USA has launched the third phase of imperialism where finance capital dominates the world.

Moreover, the everyday capitalism carries all features of the three different phases of imperialism to normalise capitalism as the only alternative. The third phase of imperialism has failed to deliver the desired goals of capitalism with the help of globalisation.

The roads to peace, prosperity, democracy, freedom, and human rights are incompatible with cultural, political, and economic values of everyday capitalism and imperialism. Therefore, working people across the globe bears brunt of everyday imperialism and its fraudulent narratives that shape mass consciousness. The structurally exploitative systems and processes of everyday

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imperialism exacerbate inequality while seeking profit over peace and people. In pursuit of profit and dominance, everyday imperialism produces miseries by reinforcing imperialist wars and conflicts on people on everyday basis. Such perpetual cycle of everyday imperialism destroys all historic achievements of working people and their struggles.

Everyday imperialism in all its manifestations has profound implications for the working class. Globalisation and cultural dominance by capitalist countries and their corporations perpetuate inequalities and

exploit workers worldwide. However, working class politics provides a means to challenge and resist imperialism. Through collective action, solidarity, and grassroots organising, the working class can confront the systemic forces that perpetuate economic and cultural imperialism.

All forms of resistance to everyday imperialism and its capitalist values are the starting point towards a resilient and sustainable future. The time is pregnant with many alternatives to defeat everyday imperialism and capitalism to establish world peace. □□□ [Contributed]

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**NOTE**


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## The Delusions of Growth

*I Satya Sundaram writes:*

**T**HE BOOK [DAVID PILLING: The Great Delusion: Wealth, Poverty and the Well-being of Nations; Tim Duggan Books, New York, Pp 291. Price: \$26] discusses the various dimensions of delusions about economic growth. It is helpful in understanding the obsession with growth.

It is realised increasingly that the GDP does not necessarily translate into well-being. There is nothing wrong with economic growth, but it should be properly harnessed to ensure distributive justice and sustainability. Economist Kuznets [who won Nobel Prize in 1971] is considered the Father of GDP. However, Kuznets was striving for a measure that would reflect welfare rather than a crude summation of all activity [p, 24]. He thought national accounts should measure only economic activity that was good for people [p, 29]. The huge expenditure on advertising, financial and speculative activities is unwarranted.

Countries try to increase the size of the economy by two ways—[i] trying to shift people into paid em-

ployment or attracting new labour in the form of immigrants; and [ii] raising productivity by getting those people to work more efficiently [p,50]. Of course, adding people is in many ways easier than raising productivity.

Unpaid work is not taken into account while calculating GDP. This has led to many anomalies. If a person lives in a rented apartment, the monthly rent is a part of the economy; if he lives in his own house, no rent is included in the GDP calculation. Thus, the home owning country would look poorer relative to the home-renting country. However, there is what is called imputation. Though one lives in one's own house, the rent is calculated as if he is in a rented house. The imputed rent is included in the GDP. Finland is typical in showing unpaid housework as contributing some 40 percent to total economic activity [p, 57].

The story of modern inequality is complex. Inequality is rising within most countries, especially high-income ones. But, at the global level, inequality among some nations is actually declining. The gap between

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incomes in parts of Asia, on the one hand, and Western Europe, the US and Australasia on the other, has narrowed, particularly since 2000. This is attributed to rapid industrialisation in Asia, especially in China, and more recently in India [p, 96]. This is a welcome outcome as these two countries are important for the size of their population.

According to OECD, at the global level, inequality has increased for three main reasons: [i] wages have risen for those people who were already well paid; [ii] there are fewer jobs for less well educated people who have been dropping out of the job market in large numbers, and [iii] there are more single parent families [p,98].

One issue that has been engaging the attention of economists is: Does economic growth enhance human happiness? The current stress is on happiness studies. One good news is that the results of different surveys tend to match [p, 202]. The shift in stress is because the GDP is not going to tell anything that people want to know about welfare. The

World Happiness Report came out in 2012.

Not sufficient attention is paid to unemployment which is a double blow because it affects not only income, but self-esteem and sense of purpose. A fall in income by a third has a negative impact on happiness [p, 207]. Health is also equally important. Layard has observed: "We know that the really big factors that influence happiness are mental health, which is largely important, and the quality of relationships in

the family, at work, and in the community." [p, 208]. He further said: "You will never see any difference in national happiness because of how long it takes to get from London to Liverpool." [pp, 208,209].

In 1972, the Fourth King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, a teenage monarch, made his country the first in the world to declare Gross National Happiness [GNH] in place of GDP. GNH is not focused primarily on subjective well-being or self-reported happiness. Instead, it

conceives of an objective view of happiness with Buddhist overtones [p, 215].

GNH is related to some factors: psychological well-being, health, time use, education, cultural diversity, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and resilience and living standards.

The message of the book is crystal clear. India should give priority, not to huge statues and speed trains, but to basic needs and people-friendly environment. □□□

#### A SURVEY

## Crisis in Tea Industry of West Bengal-1

*Aswini Kumar Pramanik  
Nityananda Ghosh*

**T**HE AGRO-BASED INDUSTRIES in West Bengal have a long history. Especially the tea and jute industries deserve special mention. These are in the organised sector with thousands of labourers employed therein. Still these have been the most troubled industries in the state for long. History shows that there were good old days for Jute industry attracting labourers from across the country. But recent past witnessed only retrenchment, lay-off, lock-out and all that which tell of the end of its colourful past. However, mill owners' claim about its bad health is not without purpose. The industry is not dead still, though, but only limping and earning profits when in motion. But it is claiming huge government subsidies for its technological up-gradation and survival. The Tea industry, on the other hand, was an export-oriented industry since its inception, owned mostly by colonial masters to cater to their needs in the country of their origin. The labourers were the Adivasis of the Chotonagpur plateau, Orissa, Tamilnadu, Madhya Pradesh and some locals. They were

low paid, ill fed from the beginning and tortured to extreme exploitation in an alien land like the plantation areas of Bengal and Assam. History tells of brutal murder of hundreds of them when they secretly attempted to escape the gardens at the dead of night and to go back to their native place. The living bodies were brought back and engaged forcefully to the gardens. The Adivasis have since been there in the gardens eking out a poor livelihood for themselves and their families. Today the colony is over. But their condition has not changed much. They are subjected to starvation deaths and all those related ills that prevail in the tea industry. But why? Simply that very question haunted the present authors and compelled them to undertake a survey in the tea gardens of Darjeeling district and in the Dooars region in the month of November '22 to find an answer, if at all, to it. Here's what is their study in some randomly selected tea gardens of the above areas.

The study pays attention to a report published in [www.dnaindia](http://www.dnaindia) by Amrita Madhukalya on 7 th Decem-

ber ,2015. The report says that 65 workers died in North Bengal tea gardens owing to starvation. The deaths relate to the gardens as here-under:

<b>Gardens</b>	<b>No of deaths</b>
Birpara Tea Estate	21
Hantapara Tea Estate	16
Dhumchipara Tea Estate	15
Gargandya Tea Estate	07
Nageswari Tea Estate	06

Rajmon Lohar of the Hantapara Tea Estate of the Duncan Group died of severe colic pain for more than 15 days and breathed his last on 15 September 2015. No treatment he got in any hospital or any health centre. And he left behind his wife Behani Lohar and their four offspring. One among them is a physically challenged. The family owes a debt of Rs Ten Thousand. The little ones work as stone crushers to get the family going.

The story does not end with Lohar family only. This was the fate of thousand labourers and their families in the closed tea gardens. There were twenty five closed tea gardens in the Terai-Doors region citing the cause of huge cost of production. The horrific situation drew the attention of the High Court of Calcutta and the Hon'ble Court intervened under the leadership of the Hon'ble Justice Smt Manjula Chellur to get some relief to the workers of the

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affected gardens. The situation didn't changed much, although.

There is another report of The Centre for Education and Communication, Delhi and the UTUC WB (March 2002–Feb 2003) which reveals that there were thirty closed tea gardens in North Bengal and the number of workers' death was 240 during that period. (ref: Nityananda Ghosh in Parichoy Nov 2005–Jan 2006, pp 29-30).

Again in 2010-11 there was closure of 14-15 tea gardens. 'Right-to-Food Campaign India' conducted a survey in some twelve gardens where data were available and found that the total number of affected labourers was 18323 and that of the families was 11196. And the total population distressed was 74190. They further reported that their survey in 14 affected families reveals that the per capita calorie intake of ten families was less than 1800 unit whereas the same for seven more families was even worse—it was less than 1400 unit. The intake of egg and other nutritious food was almost nil. And it is worth mentioning that the most affected were the women workers in any family since they constitute 70% of the workforce.

Apart from the above mentioned organization, other NGOs, Citizens' Rights Forums, FIAN International and many other conscious and concerned people brought the fact to light that the women workers don't get even 1% of the price of one KG of tea as their wages a day. This type of utter exploitation, low wages, and closure of gardens force the womenfolk to take to prostitution. There is the child labour again—the children were bound to work for more than twelve to fourteen hours a day. The constitutional provision against the child labour does not have access to this wild empire. The child labour is hence, cheap and extremely exploitative. This picture can have its paral-

lel in the western classics depicting the sub-human exploitation in the seventeenth and eighteenth century capitalist development in the UK and other western world. Therefore, the deaths of 65 or 100 or 242 are not more than mere statistics which are quite natural and unavoidable in this garden economy.

But the state Govt, of the period i.e. 2004-05 or 2015 did never admit that there were any starvation deaths in the tea gardens at that time. They rather invented a new theory that no starvation but malnutrition may be the reason for the deaths quoted or otherwise. This is no doubt an innovative definition for the deaths! The workers who could not earn a whole meal for the family members naturally throws the members into so many deficiencies including of nutrition. The issues of nutrition and calorie intake etc. only point to the basic requirement of a handful of rice for the starving members. It becomes a simple joke when the question of rice is overshadowed by the catchy word 'malnutrition'. There was a particular purpose for this trickery by the rulers. They wanted to divert the attention of the middle class people by this oft repeated term malnutrition popular in their parlance and to befuddle the suffering workers by such innovation. Did the workers get convinced? Their experience taught them other bitter truth.

True to say, the Govts., then and afterwards were no different in their innovation and wanted to disown their responsibility of that crucial situation. And they could preach this vulgarism in a democratic system. And again the irony is that this democratic system also exposed the rulers' hypocrisy by throwing the question of hunger to the sane intelligentsia. The Hon'ble High Court of Calcutta too intervened. The Right to Food Campaign India, an NGO led by Mrs Anuradha Talwar con-

ducted survey among a wider number of tea garden workers and finally took the agenda to the highest judiciary for a solution of the serious issue. It is seen afterwards that the state and the central govt. had to share some responsibility. The rationing system was introduced among the tea garden workers then. The Central Govt. is distributing 5 kg and the state govt. is distributing 35 kg of rice /atta per head per month to the tea garden workers now. This was continued before and after the epidemic period also. This has helped lessen the starvation death count to a large extent. However, there are two opinions about the scheme's coverage and some say that there is misuse of the scheme with particular reference to workers belonging to small and closed gardens. A lot many have remained outside the rationing scheme or are delisted from the BPL category. The trade unions affiliated to ruling party, however, deny there is any such deviation.

This third party intervention viz the State's intervention has contributed to the changed reality but at the same time it has obfuscated the role of the tea garden owners to their workers. To amplify. The owners have the responsibility to ensure that their workers are sufficiently paid to survive for the interest of production. It is of course ,in an ideal situation. Contrary to this ideal situation. the workers are paid only for their survival and not that for the family members. The family members—the womenfolk and the chil-

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dren have necessarily to enroll themselves to earn their own daily bread. This uncertainty in a worker's family life is the stark reality which the present system of production nurtures for profit at the base /factory level and for continuation of the class rule in the State structure. It therefore ,becomes incumbent upon the State to come to the relief of the owners whenever any such situation arises. In this case, the rationing system has served that purpose. The Govt. is projected here as the representative of a benevolent State, always at the service of the workers. What a wonderful arrangement! Anyway, the starvation death is brought down to a certain level but not completely eradicated. Thanks to the NGOs. the civil liberty organizations and the intellectuals for whatever relief could be achieved for the workers. Strikingly, the government agencies, namely Tea Board and umpteen departments did play no role or poor role to that end.

Does the prevailing situation augur any better condition now than the ones in 2004-05 or 2015?

The survey undertook that question into consideration and conducted its tasks in the following tea gardens to find an answer:

#### **Happy Valley Tea Estate**

Date of Survey : 20.11.2022

Garden Established in : 1854 AD

Founder of the Garden : Mr David Wilson. The Garden was named after him at that time and was titled –Wilson Tea Estate.

The Garden was later on purchased by Mr Tarapada Banerjee of Hooghly District in 1903. He then merged the Windsor Tea Estate with this garden. The Garden again changed its name to Happy Valley Tea Estate in 1929.

The tea plants accordingly are aged nearly 80 to 150 years.

This garden is the second oldest tea garden in Darjeeling District. There

are ten more tea gardens under the estate. The owner is Mr Sanjay Bansal of the Ambutia Group since the year 2008. The latest hand over of its ownership had taken place in favour of one Mr Riju Agarwal.

Mr Sanjay Bansal did organize one tea estate namely Darjeeling Organic Tea Estate Private Limited with a view to revitalizing the sick and closed tea gardens of the area. The Ambutia group then undertook the ownership of three tea gardens : Rungmuk Cedar Tea Estate, Pandam Tea Estate and Rangarun Tea Estate. But now the ownership of the Happy Valley Tea Estate itself is ultimately transferred.

Obviously, Happy Valley is much more famous than others. It has an area of 177 hectares (440 acres) and is situated at an altitude of 2100 meter above sea level and three km north of Darjeeling beside 1 Lebung Road.

The number of permanent labourers : 1500. The rest are casual workers.

Since the garden is located at a high altitude, its production starts at a later date. But the demand for its first flush and second flush leaf is worldwide. It ranks among the top international exporters of tea. The FAO of UN among others, has accorded it a rare prestige of a model tea garden. These accolades ,however, don't speak all of the garden. The workers who are at the root of all these good standings are far away from this bright light. The surveyors witnessed on their day of survey that the tea gardens of this group are under a spell of strike since 19.11.2022, i.e. the day before the visit. The Factory and Garden management was therefore, beyond the reach of these surveyors for any data, in spite of local level communications with them. Their Kolkata office too was non communicative despite repeated requests for data.

**Cause of the Strike:** According to the labourers who could be communicated ,they have not been getting salary for four months since August last. As per official guidelines, the pruning of the tea plants continues from 15 December to 15 February of every year. The first flush starts after 15 February. Now the Management has thrown the labourers in a peculiar situation saying that if the workers want to do the required work i.e. pruning etc, they can do it of their own. The Management is unable to pay them any remuneration for those work. Hence, the call for strike is spontaneous and all embracing. All the 60-70 factory workers and 250-300 field workers have participated in the strike. Even all the other gardens of the group also participated in it.

The surveyors could talk to the spouse of a women worker within the factory campus where they have built their house. He told that,

- there is reduction of rationing in the garden
- there is reversal of welfare measures like school facility and tuition fees, health services etc.
- no construction of houses in the labour lines; neither repairs of the existing quarters are undertaken by the management. They only allow construction of the houses by the workers themselves in a small plot of land fixed for them, at their own cost.
- the EPF deducted from the workers' salary are not refunded after retirement.

But he remained non-committal as to which organization had given such a big call. He emphasized in reply the role of the workers themselves. Moreover, there was a subtle tone of no-confidence in all existing trade unions. Even the administration was not spared in this regard. However, he admitted that they were not affiliated to any established trade unions.

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This emptied the surveyors of the necessary statistics as regards target for production and export which is a very relevant factor for the survey of this garden. The only truth that was laid bare before the surveyors was that all was not well with these export centric big tea gardens where the strike call was for a genuine cause and that it gained all out support from the workers of all the gardens of the group. A unique experience gathered in this survey!

Next to that was the over confidentiality maintained by the management in disseminating information to the media. Statutory information had to be provided to the official agencies for various reasons and interests but not to the media for some queer reasons best known to themselves. This experience is not specific to this garden alone but can be had from some other big garden as the survey work proceeds.

#### **Makaibari Tea Estate**

Next target of the survey was Makaibari Tea Estate. It is located not far away from Kurseong. The survey team arrived at the factory on 21.11.2022 at around 1.30 pm. Unfortunately, Mr Sujay Das, the Manager had left the office. Since he was the 'competent person' to provide all such required information, his departure left the team without direct information about the garden. Even the identity card of the journalist whatsapped to him on his demand, could not ensure a phone call from him next morning even though that was his commitment. Consequently the team had to depend on some indirect knowledge from a collection of articles published in various newspapers of repute. The data available were

- the area of the garden : 677 hectares
- the garden was established in : 1840 AD by Mr G.C Banerjee
- the factory established in : 1859 AD

The present owner Mr Rudra Chatterjee got the ownership transferred from the great-grandson Mr Swaraj (Raja) Banerjee at some time after 2010. Mr Raja Banerjee converted the Tea Garden into an 'Organic' farming garden in the year 1988 and again to 'bio-dynamic' phase years later. It is claimed to be the first of its kind in the world. It was a very bold initiative in the tea farming. This is how the Makaibari Tea Estate is commended in an article published in the New York Times by Mr Manish Mishra dt 14.10.2007. But the team's persistent endeavour for further basic information in their Kolkata office fell flat owing to the non-cooperative attitude of a section of top officials. Unfortunately, the office's search for the 'competent person' went on for more than a month to compel the team to leave the agenda.

#### **Castleton Tea Garden**

On 22.11.2011 in the morning, the team went to Castleton Tea Garden ,a garden under Goodricke Group, situated at a walking distance from Kurseong town. The admission was restricted and hence a look at the workers from afar plucking leaves in the garden was enough for the team to redirect its destination to the factory office of the garden some yards away. The Manager of the factory, Mr Rajkumar Sinha agreed to provide the information. A very well mannered person did offer a cup of garden tea to the team members.

The data which he provided were:

- the area of the garden : 318 hectares
- total no of workers : 550
- No of office staff : 70

The leaf plucking workers earn a salary of Rs 3000-5000 every 15 days, This includes their salary of Rs 2000 + additional income.

On an average, the garden exports to the extent of 40-50% of their production. However, the ex-

port has got a jerk due to Ukraine War.

Secondly, the cost of production has gone up excessively. Simultaneously, Nepal has thrown up a challenge in the export market. The lower cost of production of the Nepal tea has added an advantage for their export potential over others.

He informs further that there are 300 tea gardens under Goodricke Group of which 12 are in the Dooars region. This is the only foreign company which is in this trade. Eight Sterling companies merged with the Goodricke Group and began its journey from 1 January, 1978 by an order of the Hon'ble High Court of Calcutta. The philosophy of this group is 'Business with a soul' The aim is to produce high quality tea commensurate with the high standard of living of the workers. And of course, the environment gets due place in their production process. This particular outlook separates them from others and earns them a unique position in the tea industry. ([www.goodricke.com](http://www.goodricke.com)) This group is part of Camelia plc-UK. They conduct their business with due diligence to FERA.

Mr Sinha confirms that the Goodricke Group as a whole is doing good business and has been in profit. And yet they are maintaining their welfare measures for the workers. Every garden including Castleton Tea Garden has their hospital and doctors. And there are the housing and school facilities for the workers. In a word, the company expends a large amount of money for the welfare of the workers every year.

The tea plants lived on this earth for hundred years or even more. The number of the leaves and their quality deteriorate as a natural law. The law necessitates, therefore, the replantation and new plantation in new lands to maintain the standard. The large gardens consistently main-

tain this process. The Goodricke group undertakes new plantation every year at a rate of 2.5%—said Mr Sinha. And last of all, he informs that thanks to the Panchayat Raj System, the gardens have now come under the rationing system.

Regarding finance, they don't face any difficulty and are managing their transaction with some big banks of the land.

The team now turns to the plain land gardens of Dooars region. The survey here concentrated on three tea gardens viz. Gopalpur Tea Garden—a little bit away from Birpara, Beech Tea Garden of the Western Group near Hasimara. and Dima Tea Garden of Kalchini.

The visit to these tea gardens was preceded by interviews with some veteran trade unionists attached to the tea industry. Their valuable opinions have been placed latter in this article.

#### **Gopalpur Tea Garden**

It is a much acclaimed 'Model' tea garden. The administration utilizes it as such for its own interest and propoganda. But why is it called a 'Model'?

The management and the trade union leadership both hold that it is a model tea garden because for years there is no industrial unrest and there is peace in the garden. Moreover, its area and capacity for production make it advanced in comparison with other tea gardens in the locality.

The statistics that could be gathered are as follows:

Area of the garden : 1250 acres.  
The total area of the land is 2050 acres.

Production in 2021 there was a production of 13 lakh kilogram, 90% of which was auctioned in Siliguri Auction centre. The average price per kg is Rs 250/.

No of workforce : 1200 which include both office staff and garden workers.

The top staff structure : 1 Manager, 8 Asst. Managers (field) 3 Asst. Manager (factory).

Present Owner : Mr Ratan Somani (Kolkata).

Total No of tea gardens : 23, scattered around Birpara and its neighborhood.

The garden was established in the year 1912 under the ownership of Mr Biren Ghosh.

Trade Unions: In all these gardens, the INTTUC affiliated trade unions are the majority ones. Once dominated by the left trade unions ,its members shifted two years back to the BMS led trade unions. The INTTUC led trade union secretary Mr Nikhil Baraik had joined these surveyors to have a round of the factory. Thanks to Mr Pranab Mishra, the Manager for providing the above noted data about the Garden.

Mr Mishra also confirmed in the presence of Mr Baraik that the Garden has paid Bonus to the workers@ 20%. He further informed that the garden maintains the welfare measures for its workers like a hospital with doctor and nurse ready all the time. The other measures to mention are provision of school bus although there is no school in the garden premises. The govt. aided school, of course, exists nearby. The residential accommodations in the labour lines are built up by the workers themselves. The garden management doesn't take any responsibility in this regard.

Mr Mishra gave one information that the garden doesn't apply any pesticide which, it seems, is not beyond doubt since the much vaunted exporters of the region claiming identically apply the pesticide in their garden too. But the most important aspect to which he drew the attention of the survey team was that the owner of this garden is not like others. He has a sincere outlook to build this garden

a 'model' tea garden in real sense of the term. This very outlook gets reflected in the day-to-day industrial relationship of the workers and the garden owner. The peace has been an important factor in maintaining the ever heightened production of the garden. There is, of course, the role of modernization process in garden farming and the factory machinery. And it also deserves mention that the company has built up twelve new residential quarters for its employees-he added.

The overall opinion he expressed in the end that the tea industry is still a very profitable enterprise.

Mr Nikhil Baraik himself is driver to the Manager's car. The team was advised by the local people to enquire in his house in the labor line about his availability to talk to the team. The team got the opportunity to talk to his elder sister-in-law, Smt Bihani Baraik, herself a worker in this garden. The surveyors got direct knowledge from her about working condition in the garden.

- The worker gets Rs 232.00 per day as wages and earns 13 days wages in a 15 days' period after deduction of leaves. This accumulates to Rs 2100.00 after statutory deduction of PF.
- The working hours start from 8 am to 3 pm. with half an hour lunch time at 12 noon. But many are engaged in plucking extra quantity of leaf which may extend their time to 4-4.30 pm.
- The number of women workers exceeds male workers who prefer being engaged in non-garden works. Even their next generation doesn't want to work in the tea garden. They are going through the education and leaving the garden with some other jobs .This gives birth to a new crisis -the crisis of future worker particularly male worker in the tea gardens. This is a common issue with all

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the tea gardens. The main reason, she too points out, is poor wages.

- Smt Bihani, a mother of three children is sending her daughter to college in Jalpaiguri. Though she is not illiterate either. Her education stops at the end of class six level. She now is a member of self help group which contributes in some way to her family.
- On the other hand, Mr Nikhil Baraik has two children. His daughter is also a college student but his son a student of class eight cherishes the goal of joining the army and serve the country. His wife is also a class eight pass-out. He says that his grandfather came from a place either in Jharkhand or Bihar and now they have been working and residing here for three generations. He mentions that the workers in the plain land gardens are mostly of Modesia group. There are some other people also including some Bengalees. But there is no enmity among them and they live side by side with harmony.
- One interesting point is that the parents send their children to Bengali medium schools rather than to any other mediums including Hindi.
- On a question by the team members, Smt Bihani replies that there is no starvation death in or around the garden. The rationing system of both the state and the centre has been of immense help to ward off that menace. She lays this emphasis owing perhaps to her allegiance to the ruling party. Anyway the team thanked her a lot.

#### **Dima Tea Estate**

On 24.11.2022, the survey team first visited the Dima Tea Estate of Kalchini. From old Hasimara bus stop one has to proceed towards Kalchini by an auto or a magic car. From there 2-3 km by an auto or by

some other mode one has to reach the Dima Tea Estate. On both sides of the road, the tea gardens present a soothing scenery to the eyes. Of course there is another factor. The train passes on the rails towards Alipurduar through these scenic beauty on both sides.

The surveyors cross the entrance of the garden and face the trade union leader Mr Bimal Kuzur (aged 52) Some reference came to the team's help. And he agreed to talk. He is moreover, a technical staff of the garden which ensured reliability of the data provided. These are as follows:

- the area of the garden : 750 acres.
- the number of workers : 1800 plus 600 bigha (casual workers)
- most of the workers are Modesiyas (75%, Nepali 25%,) some are Bengalees and the rest are of some other states.
- Wages at par with the "A" class gardens, i.e. Rs 232 per day.
- production in the year 2021 : 14 lakh kilograms
- present owners : Mr Manas Patel, Mr S Patel and Ms Geeta Patel of the Govinda Estate Private Ltd.

The present owners purchased this garden from Buxa Duars Company Ltd in 2003. 'They promised to pay the workers their due arrear of Rs 1 crore and 77 lakh as a pre-condition of the deal. The promise remains unfulfilled during these 19 years now.

The present condition of the garden is strong and sound which is manifest in its environs.

- The workers got 16% bonus in 2021 and 18% in 2022. But the bigha (casual) workers are not paid this bonus except their usual wages of Rs 232 per day.
- The workers get the statutory rationing of 35 kg from the state and 5 kg from the centre every month.

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- The Garden does not have any school facility. The Govt. aided schools are the only hope for the workers.
- There is a hospital inside the garden but that remains almost defunct. An RMP doctor and four nursing staff are present but no medicine is available there.
- The quarters in the labour lines are standing in a dilapidated condition. The repairs are done by the occupants themselves. No cost is borne by the authority.
- The trade union claiming majority is affiliated to INTTUC since 2014. Only a few officers owe their allegiance to the BMS.

The workers joining this conversation were Jaduman Nayak (47), Dilip Rai (54)—all are casual workers. Jaduman was enthusiastic to show his dilapidated residence with some faint hope.

The Kolkata office of the Estate was visited by the surveyors team for some data as well as to seek confirmation of what the workers deliberated. As usual, the reply of “competent person not available right now” was ready for the team. It appears that behind this facade of ‘competent person’ many important

information are sought to be concealed from the visiting team. This practice is followed piously by many in the tea garden managements.

#### **Beech Tea Estate**

The last of the survey was conducted in Beech Tea Estate—a garden on both sides of the national highway near Hasimara. This is in Alipurduar District and is 4 km away from Hasimara Rail Station on the south.

- The area of this garden : 750 hectares
- No of workers : 1500 plus 1000 bigha (casual)
- Production of the Garden : 17.50 lakh kg in the year 2021
- Owners of the Garden : Mr Kanisth Sethia. The Bajorias handed over the ownership to the present owners in 2006.

The manager of the Garden is Mr Kamalesh Jha, a resident of Bihar and the Manager (factory) is Mr Pranab Kumar Saha from Nabadwip. The later is in the Garden for nearly nine years.

Mr Saha asserted that the replantation and new plantation in the Garden is an incessant process and the Garden has reaped the benefits of it. The consequence is that the production has reached this

level of 17.5 lakh kg from a meagre 7 lakh kg a few years ago. This is no mean achievement.

The benefits goes to the workers as well. The worker earns Rs 232 per day as wages.

They have got the Bonus @ 20% as in all ‘A’ class gardens. All the permanent and casual workers are eligible for it. Moreover, the casual workers too get the facility of PF. In addition to this, there is the statutory rationing system for the workers. He further asserts that there is no starvation death in this garden.

Other welfare measures like Hospital-Doctor-Nurse, one primary School are provided to the workers. There are, of course, one govt. aided Secondary School nearby.

The overall view of the tea industry as opined by Mr Saha, is that it's a very tough time for the industry. Production augmentation with quality maintenance is the challenge of the hour. Combination of Quality and Quantity is the way to survival.

He also reaffirms the Indian Tea Board decision that up to 17 December the plucking will continue and thereafter the First Flush will recommence on and from 15 February. □□□

[To be concluded]

## THE SUBALTERNIST (MIS?) REPRESENTATION

### Partha Chatterjee on Kolkata Anthropology

**Abhijit Guha**

**I**N A RECENT LECTURE DELIVERED on 15 May 2023 at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences (CSSS), Kolkata, Partha Chatterjee, the former Director of CSSS narrated the history of the oldest Department of Anthropology in India at the University of Calcutta. The lecture was entitled ‘Science or Cultural Interpretation: Anthropology at the University of Calcutta, 1920-1970’. The summary of the lecture is available at <https://twitter.com/CSSSCal>. In the aforesaid lecture,

Chatterjee, who was one of the major collaborators of Ranajit Guha and his subaltern school of history, depicted the works of the anthropologists of the University of Calcutta in a highly biased and partial manner.

In Chatterjee’s words: ‘The Anthropology Department at the University of Calcutta was established in 1920. Since there were no trained Indian anthropologists available, the first teachers came from the Ancient Indian History department and taught prehistory and archaeology. When

they began to carry out their own research, the early members of the department became involved in debates over the racial classification of the Indian population. The curriculum too put a strong emphasis on theories of race and methods of anthropometry. Students from the department went on to get higher degrees abroad and became leading figures in physical anthropology at Delhi, Lucknow and the Anthropological Survey of India’ (Chatterjee 2023).

This description might have given an impression, as if, social-cultural anthropology, a very important branch of anthropology, was not taught at the University of Calcutta; nor were

students trained in intensive fieldwork (not much required in physical anthropology) in this branch of anthropology. The facts were far away from the assertions of Partha Chatterjee!

Anthropology department at the University of Calcutta from its very inception emphasised and practised the discipline from a holistic perspective, and teaching and research were being done in all the three major sub-disciplines of the subject, viz. (i) physical anthropology, (ii) social-cultural anthropology and (iii) prehistoric archaeology. André Bêteille, the famous sociologist who was trained in anthropology at the University of Calcutta in his undergraduate and postgraduate levels in the 1950s recounted in his autobiographical account in the Annual Review of Anthropology:

'The half-dozen teachers we had covered all branches of the subject: paleontology, prehistoric archaeology, material culture, religion and magic, and social organisation. One of the teachers had a special interest in museology, so he talked endlessly about museum methods. Yet a teacher was not necessarily bad because he was self-taught and did not have original research publications. One of those who taught us about society and culture, Mr T C Das, was meticulous and conscientious and had a vast store of detailed ethnographic knowledge' (Bêteille 2013:4).

Another internationally famous anthropologist who held the positions of the Director, Anthropological Survey of India and the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta was Surajit Sinha who also earned his M.Sc. degree in anthropology from the University of Calcutta during the late 1940s specialised in social-cultural anthropology. Sinha was rigorously trained in fieldwork in social-cultural anthropology at the University of Calcutta by T C Das who was his teacher. In Sinha's own words:

'In March, 1950 late Professor Tarak Chandra Das suggested to me that I should take up a study of the Bhumij tribe, an off-shoot of the

Munda of Ranchi District, since this tribe has been drawn very near to the caste system by the process of acculturation... Professor Das had also published a short monograph on the Bhumij of Seraikella in 1931. Professor Das suggested to me that my enquiry should be mainly based on intensive field study of a Bhumij dominated village in Manbhum district of Bihar where they were already reported in the Census as caste and spoke Bengali, having lost their original Mundari language'7+ (Sinha 1978:149-150).

The above quotation clearly showed that Surajit Sinha was not doing his studies on physical anthropology, and much later in an article published in 1971 Sinha observed that his teacher TC Das tried to rigorously develop field methods in social-cultural anthropology in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Calcutta, which could be 'fruitfully utilised in describing the living conditions of tribals, peasants as well as urbanites' (Sinha 1971:7). T C Das's social anthropological monograph on the Purum Kukis of Manipur entitled *The Purums: An Old Kuki Tribe of Manipur*, published by the Calcutta University in 1945, became a major source of database in the acrimonious debate on descent versus alliance theories on kinship in *Anglo-American Anthropology* that involved renowned anthropologists like Claude Lévi-Strauss, George Homans, David Schneider, Rodney Needham, Floyd Lounsbury, and others (Guha 2011:256). Das's other book on the Bengal famine of 1943 (see Das 1949) was a unique and rare first-hand study done by any anthropologist or social scientist on the victims of one of the greatest tragedies of the country under the colonial rule (Guha 2010:90-94). An earlier version of the book was discussed in the then British Parliament and some of the recommendations advanced by Das were adopted in 1944 by the Famine Inquiry Commission formed by the colonial government for the prevention of future

famines in India (ibid.: iii-iv). Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in his book *The Discovery of India* also mentioned the anthropological survey conducted by Das on the famine-affected population of Bengal and, even before the book was published, expressed his confidence on the results of the survey in contrast to the one carried out by the government (Nehru 1981/1946: 495-96). The Nobel Laureate economist Amartya Sen has also used Das's original work several times in his famous book *Poverty and Famines* (Sen 1999).

T C Das was not the lone social anthropologist at the University of Calcutta during 1930-60. Another very talented social-cultural anthropologist was Kshitish Prasad Chattopadhyay who was one of most distinguished anthropologists of India. He was born on 15th December 1897 and had a brilliant academic career. He earned a First Class Honours degree in Physics from the University of Calcutta. In 1919, he went to United Kingdom and took his admission at Cambridge University in Physics and began his studies under famous physicists like Thompson and Rutherford. But soon he changed his subject and obtained his Masters degree in anthropology in 1922. He came in contact with the famous British anthropologist WHR Rivers, who was his teacher and Chattopadhyay was awarded the Anthony Wilkins Fellowship to carry out his research on the Newar community of Nepal. The fellowship was later withdrawn because of his activities with the Indian Seamen's Union (London), which were regarded as objectionable and he was not allowed to visit Nepal for his fieldwork by the then colonial government (Hutton 1963:155-156). He came back to India in 1922 with M A degree in anthropology from Cambridge University (IJCS 1964:111-112). During 1937-1962 K P Chattopadhyay served as the Head of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Calcutta in its formative phase. During this period

the department flourished in all the three major sub-disciplines of Anthropology, namely, physical anthropology, prehistoric archaeology and social-cultural anthropology. In 1955, the Department of Anthropology at the University of Calcutta was chosen by the University and the UNESCO to hold a conference on the Study of Changes in Traditional Culture and with the able academic and administrative leadership of K P Chattopadhyay the conference was not only held most successfully but the whole proceedings of the conference along with the discussions were also meticulously recorded and published in the form of a book by the University of Calcutta in 1957. Under the encouraging guidance of Chattopadhyay many of his students and teachers acclaimed national and international recognitions (Chattopadhyay 2000:1-7). Some of his students who later became famous at the national and international arenas were Ramkrishna Mukherjee, Surajit Sinha, B K Roy Burman, André Bêteille and many others. K P Chattopadhyay was an anthropologist with nationalist and humanist spirit who dedicated himself to the welfare of humanity. In an obituary of Chattopadhyay, which was published in *Man*, an eminent British social anthropologist noted:

'Apart from his academic work he was always active in promoting the welfare of his fellow men. As a student in England he had worked among seamen in the East End of London; in India the free primary education system in Calcutta was largely his work: as Treasurer of the People's Relief Committee, famine relief and rehabilitation work in the rural areas of Bengal owed much to him, and during the communal riots of 1946 he organised a 'Peace Corps' to restore order' (Hutton 1963:155-156).

Suffice it to say that with a social-cultural anthropologist, like Surajit Sinha trained by teachers like T C Das and K P Chattopadhyay, Kolkata

anthropology reached global standards along with physical anthropology and prehistory.

#### **Kolkata Anthropology**

In a recently published article in the famous journal founded by D N Majumdar, The Eastern Anthropologist, a former Director and a Delhi University professor Vinay Kumar Srivastava recollected:

'For many, the Delhi Anthropology Department was an extension of the Calcutta anthropology, for its founder, Dr P C Biswas, who also headed the Department from 1947 to 1968, earned his master's from Calcutta University, before he proceeded to Berlin for his doctorate. However, it was not true because Dr Biswas was principally a biological anthropologist, bearing the imprint of German ethnology on him. For social anthropology thus, the Delhi Department looked at Kolkata for academic content, and also to those departments of anthropology in the country which the Kolkata-trained anthropologists started, of which Professor D N Majumdar, who was appointed a lecturer to teach 'primitive economics' in the Lucknow Economics Department, was a prominent name'. (Srivastava 2018:453)

In the rest of the article Vinay Srivastava showed that social-cultural anthropology in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Calcutta was a pioneer in rejecting the older anthropological notion of treating tribal societies as static and isolated and it was Kolkata social anthropology, which 'promoted a historical understanding of India' (Ibid 2018:455). Kolkata social anthropology continued its viable existence through the 1970s and 80s in its practice towards the upliftment of the underprivileged and marginalised communities, which according to Vinay Srivastava was best exemplified by the works of Probodh Kumar Bhowmick of the department on the Lodha community who were designated as a 'Criminal Tribe' by the British colonial administration' (Ibid

2018:456 and also see Bhowmick 1981:6-8)

#### **Conclusion**

It is not true that the Department of Anthropology at the University of Calcutta did not practise social-cultural anthropology as viewed by Partha Chatterjee, who now holds the position of a professor in Anthropology at Columbia University, USA. Chatterjee ignored internationally famous researches done by a generation of social-cultural anthropologists who either taught or were trained in this vital sub-discipline of anthropology. He also missed the contributions of pioneering social-cultural anthropologists like L K Ananthakrishna Iyer (1861-1937), Sarat Chandra Mitra (1863-1938), Ramaprasad Chanda (1873-1942), Panchanan Mitra (1892-1936), and Haran Chandra Chakladar (1874-1968) who taught and trained students on the history and diversity of cultures and social organisation at this 100-year-old Department of Anthropology in India. They were the pioneers in building a true nationalist anthropology for India (Sinha 1974: iii; Guha 2022). □□□

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## CHILDREN OF AURANGZEB

# Indian Muslims or High Caste Hindus?

*Shamsul Islam*

**J**UNE 7, 2023 VIOLENCE at Kolhapur as per the claims of the perpetrators affiliated to the Hindutva gang was a reaction to 'provocative' social media posts which carried photographs of Mughal ruler Aurangzeb (1618-1707) and Tipu Sultan ruler of Mysore who was killed by the British army with the help of Nizam's army on May 4, 1799. What was 'provocative' was not explained which meant that despite no ban on displaying of photos of either Aurangzeb or Tipu the posts by three Muslims boys was declared a crime. Despite arrest of those who posted these photos, the Hindutva goons in hundreds decided to invade the city. It was done despite Maharashtra being ruled by leaders appended to RSS and aggressive Hindutva politics. It is interesting to note that Sardar Patel, the first home minister of India lived in a house at Aurangzeb Road (1, Aurangzeb Road) till his death (December 15, 1950) in New Delhi. The name of the road did not offend this 'Iron Man', a current favourite of PM Modi and RSS.

The latest in this sorry saga is that on May 11, an FIR was registered by Navi Mumbai police against a man, Wasi for displaying Aurangzeb's image as his Whatsapp profile picture. He was arrested when local Hindutva organisations lodged a complaint with the police.

'Provocative' social posts or no

posts whole of Maharashtra has been witnessing the running amok of the Hindutva bandwagon. One prominent English daily described the horrible reality in the following words:

"Since November, under the banner of the amorphous Sakal Hindu Samaj, an umbrella body with no single leader or organisation, and many outfits linked to the Sangh Parivar, 'Hindu jan aakrosh' morchas or rallies have been held across the state's districts. Their stated agenda: To press for laws against 'love jihad' and 'land jihad'.

"The attendance of BJP and (Shinde) Sena leaders, MLAs, and office-bearers at many of these rallies and the climate of impunity in which hate speeches are made and minority-baiting takes place, frame an attempt by the BJP to corner its main rival for the Hindutva vote, the Uddhav Thackeray-led Sena. In the process, it also frames a curious phenomenon—of the BJP, indirectly and in local contexts, mobilising on the streets in ways that threaten the rule of law, to press its demands in a state where its own government is in power."

The most shameful response to Kolhapur violence came from Maharashtra's Deputy Chief Minister, who also holds the home ministry portfolio. When violence by the Hindutva goons was still on and the local law and order establishment

under Fadnavis was yet to analyse the causes of the violence he declared:

"The question arises that suddenly from where have so many Aurangzeb's off-springs born? Someone is behind it. Who is the real culprit/creator we will have to unearth. Who are trying to spoil the law and order situation and who want Maharashtra to be defamed, this also we will find out."

This shocking statement can only be described as crazy, toxic and motivated by deep communal prejudice. This kind of language is learned in Hindutva boudhik shivirs [intellectual training camps] and does not augur well for the stability of constitutional set-up in Maharashtra. It is sad that failure of the home department in controlling the excesses of the Hindutva zealots is being covered up by using the Hindutva rhetoric, Fadnavis if fond of use of dog-whistle to browbeat the whole of Muslim minority in Maharashtra must resign as home minister and join the Hindutva street hoodlums.

One hopes that Fadnavis has this much common-sense that when he is branding those Indian Muslims who put up photo of Aurangzeb as "Aurangzeb ki Auladen" does not mean to state that these Muslims are the direct descendants of Aurangzeb or Mughal rulers. He is using the term as a metaphor to describe them as carriers of Aurangzeb's heritage. Is it true that Indian Muslims represent or carry forward the heritage of Aurangzeb? It is a lie constructed by the Hindu nationalists. Even 'Hindu'

narrative of Aurangzeb's rule would show that his rule like the rule of other Mughal rulers of India was also the rule of Hindu High Castes as contemporary documents will show.

Hindutva zealots like Fadnavis must know that the 'Islamic' rule of Aurangzeb or Mughal rule survived due to the Hindu high Castes joining the 'Muslim' rulers in running their empires with few exceptions. How solid this unity was can be gauged by the fact that after Akbar no Mughal emperor was born of a Muslim mother. Moreover, Hindu high Castes provided brain and muscles to the 'Muslim' rulers most faithfully.

Aurobindo Ghose who played prominent role in providing Hindu foundation to the Indian nationalism confessed that Mughal rule continued due to the fact that Mughal rulers gave Hindus, "positions of power and responsibility, used their brain and arm to preserve" their kingdom. [Cited in Chand, Tara, History of the Freedom Movement in India, vol. 3, Publication Division Government of India, Delhi, 1992, p. 162.] Renowned historian Tara Chand relying on the primary source material of the medieval period concluded that from the end of 16th century to the middle of 19th century, "it may reasonably be concluded that in the whole of India, excepting the western Punjab, superior rights in land had come to vest in the hands of Hindus" most of whom happened to be Rajputs. [Chand, Tara, History of the Freedom Movement in India, vol. 1, Publication Division Government of India, Delhi, 1961, p. 124.]

Maasir al-Umara [biographies of the commanders] a biographical dictionary of the officers in the Mughal Empire beginning from 1556 to 1780 [Akbar to Shah Alam] is regarded as the most authentic record of the high rank officials employed by the Mughal rulers. This work was compiled by Shahnawaz Khan and his son Abdul Hai between 1741 and 1780. According to it Mughal rulers in this period employed around 100 (out of

365) high-ranking officials most of them "Rajputs from Rajputana, the midlands, Bundelkhand and Maharashtra". Brahmins followed Rajputs in manning the Mughal administration so far as the number was concerned. [Khan, Shah Nawaz, Abdul Hai, Maasir al-Umara [translated by H Beveridge as Mathir-ul-Umra], volumes 1 & 2, Janaki Prakashan, Patna, 1979.]

Interestingly, Kashi Nagri Pracharini Sabha [established in 1893] "committed to the cause of Hindi as official language" published Hindi translation of this book in 1931.

It is nobody's argument that Aurangzeb [1618-1707] did not commit heinous crimes against his Indian subject. It needs to be remembered that his cruelty was not restricted to non-Muslims, his own father, brothers, Shias, those Muslims who did not follow his brand of Islam and Muslim ruling dynasties in the eastern, central and western parts of India faced brutal repression and were annihilated. Aurangzeb executed renowned Sufi saint, Sarmad in the precinct of Jama Masjid of Delhi [his grave at the end of stairs on the eastern gate of Jama Masjid is revered by many]. It is also true that there were countless cases when Hindus and their religious places were violently targeted during Aurangzeb's despotic rule. However, there are contemporary records available of his patronising Hindu and Jain religious places. Two living examples are the grand Gauri Shankar temple, a stone's throw away from Lahori Gate of Red Fort, built during Shahjahan's reign which continued functioning during Aurangzeb's reign and Jain Lal Mandir just opposite Red Fort. [Trushke, Audrey, Aurangzeb: The Man and the Myth, Penguin, Gurgaon, 2017, pp. 99-106.] Reducing all his crimes to the repression of Hindus only will tantamount to reducing the gravity of his crimes against humanity.

Aurangzeb never faced Shivaji in the battle-field. It was his commander-

in-chief, a Rajput ruler of Amer (Rajasthan), Jay Singh I (1611-1667) who was sent to subjugate Shivaji (1603-1680). Jay Singh II (1681-1743), (nephew of Jay Singh I) was other prominent Rajput commander of the Mughal forces who served Aurangzeb. He was conferred the title of 'Sawai' [one and a quarter times superior to his contemporaries] chief by Aurangzeb in 1699 and thus came to be known as Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh. He was also given the title of Mirza Raja [a Persian title for a royal prince] by Aurangzeb. The other titles bestowed on him by other Mughal rulers were 'Sarmad-i-Rajaha-i-Hind' [eternal ruler of India], 'Raj Rajeshvar' [lord of kings] and 'Shri Shantanu ji' [wholesome king]. These titles are displayed by his descendants even today.

There is a first-hand account of Raja Raghunath Bahadur, a Kayasth who functioned as Deewan Ala (prime minister) of both Shahjahan, and Aurangzeb. According to a biographical work penned by one of his direct descendants,

"Raja Raghunath Bahadur having attained to the most exalted rank of Diwan Ala (prime minister) was not unmindful of the interests of his caste-fellows [Kayasths]. Raja appointed every one of them to posts of honour and emoluments, according to their individual merits; while many of them were granted titles of honour and valuable jagirs for their services. Not a single Kayasth remained unemployed or in needy circumstances."

[Lal, Maharaja Lala, Short Account of the Life and Family of Rai Jeewan Lal Bahadur Late Honorary Magistrate Delhi, With Extracts from His Diary Relating to the Times of Mutiny 1857, 1902.]

This account shows that despite the rule of Aurangzeb, a 'bigoted Muslim', a Kayasth prime minister of his was able to patronise his Caste fellows; all Hindus. Aurangzeb was so fond of this Hindu prime minister that after latter's death in a letter directed vizier (minister) Asad Khan to follow

'sage guidance' of Raja Raghunath. [Trushke, Audrey, pp. 74-75.]

The linking of Aurangzeb or other 'Muslim' rulers' crimes committed in the pre-modern India to his/her religion is going to create serious consequences even for 'Hindu' history as narrated by the RSS. Take for example, Ravana, the king of Lanka who according to again 'Hindu' narrative committed unspeakable crimes against Sita, her husband Lord Rama and his companions during 14 years long vanvaas or exile. This Ravana, according to the same narrative, was a learned Brahman who also happened to be one of the greatest worshippers of Lord Shiva.

The epic Mahabharata is a story of a great war between two families known as Pandavas and Kauravas (both Kashtriyas) not between Hindus and Muslims but between two 'Hindu' armies in which, if one goes by the 'Hindu' version 1.2 billion (120 crore) people, all Hindus are stated to have been slaughtered. Draupadi, joint wife of Pandavas was disrobed by Kauravas, all Hindus. If like Aurangzeb and other 'Muslim' rulers the crimes of Ravana, Kauravas, Jai Singh I and II etc. are linked to their religion then country will turn into a butchery. And if revenge is to be taken from the present descendants of the past perpetrators then beginning must be made from the beginning of the Indian civilisation; turn of the Indian Muslims will come far later!

Another crucial fact which is consciously kept under wrap is that despite more than 500 hundred years of 'Muslim'/Mughal rule which accord-

ing to Hindutva historians was nothing but a project of annihilating Hindus or forcibly converting the latter to Islam, India remained a nation with an almost 2/3 majority of Hindus at the historical juncture when even ceremonial 'Muslim' rule was over. The British rulers held first census in 1871-72. According to the Census report:

"The population of British India is, in round numbers, divided into 140½ millions [sic] of Hindoos (including Sikhs), or 73½ per cent., 40¾ millions of Mahomedans, or 21½ per cent. And 9¼ millions of others, or barely 5 per cent., including under this title Buddhists and Jains, Christians, Jews, Parsees, Brahmoes..."

[Memorandum on the Census Of British India of 1871-72: Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty London, George Edward Eyre and William Spottiswoode, Her Majesty's Stationary Office 1875, 16.]

These figures make it clear that persecution and cleansing of Hindus was not even a secondary project of the 'Muslim' rule. If it had been so Hindus would have disappeared from India. At the end of 'Muslim' rule Hindus were 73.5% who now according to the 2011 Census have increased to 79.80%. On the contrary Muslims who were 21.5% have been reduced to 14.23%. India seems to be the only country where despite 'Muslim' rule of more than half of a millennium the populace did not convert to the religion of the rulers.

The Indian Express (June 10, 2023) correctly stated that "The new politics of polarisation in Maharashtra is

attempting to make inroads into areas and regions of the state even with little or no significant minority presence, and where, as in Kolhapur, there has been a legacy of progressive politics upholding values of tolerance and inclusion". The moral of the story of violence perpetrated by the Hindutva zealots is that Kolhapur violence may look like to be an attempt to terrorise Muslims but the real aim is to establish Hindutva hegemony in an area which though ruled by Maratha Hindu Kings remained a princely state where rulers did not lose sight of principles of justice and egalitarianism. Shahuji Maharaj (1874-1922) who ruled Kolhapur State for 28 years took powerful measures to improve status of Sudras and lower Castes.

He patronised Satya Shodhak Samaj established by Jyotiba Phule. He abolished Untouchability. Shahuji Maharaj was the first ruler in the Indian history to provide 50% reservation in jobs and educational institutions to weaker sections. He withdrew all special privileges enjoyed by Brahmins. He went to the extent of removing Brahmin priests from palace and court duties and appointed a Maratha young man as priest of non-Brahmins. Despite strong opposition from High Castes he supported education of girls in his State.

So the RSS-BJP rulers of Maharashtra are primarily trying to cleanse all that was egalitarian, pro-women and Dalit in the history of Maharashtra. If people do not rise up to resist this Hindutva onslaught not only Maharashtra but whole of India is going to pay a very high price. □□□

## LETTER

### "The Privileged Class"

A well-known catchphrase says: "Children in the USSR are the only privileged class." The history of its origin is associated with an outstanding figure in the peace movement, laureate of the International Stalin Prize "For the strengthening of peace between peoples", head of the

Anglo-Soviet Friendship Society, rector of Canterbury Cathedral, Dr Hewlett Johnson. The details were described in the article by N Parfyonova "The Privileged Class", published on November 5, 1957 in the "Teacher's Newspaper":

"Once in Scotland, during the stay of the Soviet delegation of teachers, at one of the mass rallies, one of those present asked the rector of Canterbury Cathedral, Hewlett Johnson, who had just returned from the Soviet Union: "Tell me, is there a privileged class in the USSR?" Hewlett Johnson replied: "Yes. These are kids!"

**Yakov Sverdlov**  
[looking back at history]

মানস ভট্টাচার্য

(বামপন্থী সাংবাদিক বিক্রম নায়ারের আকর্ষণীয় ব্যক্তিত্বের স্মৃতি-আলেখ্য। নির্মাণ করেছেন নায়ারের সহকর্মী ও শাগরেদ মানস ভট্টাচার্য। অসংখ্য ঘটনা ও চরিত্রের ভিড়ে ঠাসা এই মেদুর ও মুখর পাঁচালী পাওয়া যাচ্ছে কলেজ স্ট্রিটের দে বুক স্টোর, ধ্যানবিন্দু ও লালন-এ এছাড়াও পাবেন **FRONTIER** অফিসে, **44** বলরাম দে স্ট্রিট, কলকাতা **700006** ফোন **8240016324** ডাক ও অনলাইনে পেতে যোগাযোগ করুন **9064034932** নম্বরে (লালন) বই সংক্রান্ত যেকোন বিষয়ে যোগাযোগ করুন **9432015501** নম্বরে।  
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