

frontier

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Modi in Wonderland

MANY POLITICAL OBSERVERS SEE IN MODI'S MUCH HYPED US visit an end to non-alignment. In truth the idea of non-alignment died long ago. For one thing, non-alignment is a misnomer. It is also a kind of alignment with some delicate balancing act. Even during the initial stage of non-alignment movement when the Nehru-Nasser-Nkrumah syndrome mattered in international diplomacy though marginally, the balance of non-aligned strategy tilted towards the Soviet Union. India was never against America; it never took any positive stand against America's barbarity in third world countries. New Delhi's role in America's Vietnam War was anything but opportunistic. Even Nehru didn't hesitate to take help from CIA after India-China border conflict in 1962. He allowed Americans to install surveillance equipment in the Himalayas. After the collapse of USSR, India has been desperately trying to diversify its defence purchases while maintaining its precarious relationship with Moscow. And dependence on Soviet Russia cannot be eased so easily because America won't provide veto on Kashmir.

No doubt in recent years India's strategic shift towards America has gathered momentum and it is more explicit than before. Washington is slowly but steadily integrating India in its geo-political orbit with the sole purpose of encircling China and curtailing Russian influence on Indian polity. With Afghanistan gone America has reasons to abandon its traditional age-old lackey Pakistan, at least partially, only to give some breathing space to India.

This time the White House policy makers placed extra-ordinary importance to Modi's state visit. Modi became just the third world leader after France's Macron and South Korea's Yoon Suk Yeol, to receive the grandiose diplomatic reception from President Joe Biden.

Modi has visited the US many times—most recently for a three-day visit in September 2021 but this was the first time the Prime Minister's trip was categorised as the highest ranking visit. The last state visit to the US by an Indian leader was by former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in November 2009. The Biden administration hopes it can court Modi's India as a crucial ally to counter China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

Despite India's inclusion into Quad, how far India can serve America's interests in the Indo-Pacific area is anybody's guess. Congress Party's allegation that Modi remained silent over China's incursion into Ladakh was not

without reason. Modi refused to acknowledge Chinese aggression as claimed by the Congress. In other words Modi is not going to commit another 1962 blunder. Russian support won't come in case of a bloody border conflict with China while America's help won't be decisive despite the euphoria over Modi-Biden meet generated in Indian media. It's unlikely that Modi will be able to do much for the Bidens in the Indo-Pacific, notwithstanding joint military exercises and diplomatic sabre-rating.

One thing is certain: American military-industrial complex is going to gain a lot from what they call Modi's historic visit. Quite logically there will be decrease in military cooperation with Russia. Right now India's more than 45 percent defence materials come from Russia. The second and third largest trade partners in defence sector are France

and Israel. India imports just 11 percent of its defence equipments from America. America's defence industry is trying to capture Russia's captive defence market in India. Defence deal apart, New Delhi and Washington have been engaged in discussions about jointly producing jet engines, long range artillery and military vehicles.

In May India joined 14-member Indo-Pacific Economic Framework which primarily aims to reduce China's economic dominance through manufacturing, but without drawing out a formal trade agreement. Now, American Company General Electric is hoping to co-produce military jets in the country while the US has increased investment in a semi-conductor and chip manufacturing ecosystem set in India as a way to decrease dependence on Chinese manufacturing

facilities. In the field of semiconductors and chip manufacturing India is a big player right now as huge iPhone shipments from Indian-based factories in recent months suggest.

Very recently Reuters reported that India was inching closer to buying more than two dozen US made armed drones worth \$2 to \$3 billion to help enhance border surveillance and improve counter-terrorism intelligence operations. The cheer leaders of Modi are hoping to get 'more US dollars, more US companies and more US entrepreneurs to make India a central part of their expansion plans'.

Increased military and business cooperation with America is a signal of India, somewhat overtly, moving into western camp and simultaneously reducing cooperation with Russia though officially India still claims strategic autonomy in diplomacy. □□□

COMMENT

Lineages of Lies and British Politics

THE HUNDRED AND SIX PAGES Partygate inquiry report, conducted by the Privileges Committee of the British Parliament, not only highlights the evident character of Boris Johnson as a habitual liar but also exposes the deceptive political strategies employed by the Tories. The timing of the report's release is part of a broader strategy by conservative spin doctors to construct a convenient exculpatory narrative, allowing both past and current Tory Prime Ministers to evade accountability for their utter failures while diverting public attention. The Conservative Party has been successful in diverting public scrutiny for the past fourteen years, employing customary tactics that have shielded five of its Prime Ministers from public and parliamentary scrutiny. Boris Johnson is not the first liar in Tory politics, nor

will he be the last in British politics. It is customary for both the ruling classes and non-ruling elites in British politics to propagate lies to serve their own interests.

Lies in British politics are not coincidental; they are deeply ingrained. Deception and misleading both the Parliament and the public have become customary practices in modern British politics. Manipulating public opinion through diversionary tactics has become a weapon for gaining and retaining power. False narratives and political expediency lie at the core of modern British politics, spanning from Churchill to Sunak.

The Tory-led "EU Referendum" project, for instance, was built upon a foundation of lies. Similarly, the Labour Party, under Tony Blair, infamously presented the "dodgy dos-

sier" that served as a pretext for the invasion of Iraq in 2003, also based on a pack of lies. The Costs of War Project report by Brown University and the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs revealed the devastating toll of the Iraq war from March 2003 to October 2018, with an estimated 268,000 to 295,000 people killed in violence, including 182,272 to 204,575 civilians according to Iraq Body Count's figures. Tony Blair's lies resulted in the loss of millions of Iraqi lives. The consequences were dire, not only in terms of human lives but also in financial terms. British taxpayers were burdened with a staggering £8.4 billion, and numerous British and American soldiers paid the ultimate price for the lies perpetuated by war criminals like Tony Blair and George Bush. The mistakes made by Blair and his counterparts were not mere errors but deliberate falsehoods that led to catastrophic consequences.

The vilification campaign against former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn is yet another example of the pervasive use of lies in British politics. Corbyn's unwavering honesty and integrity in both public and private life became a disqualification in the eyes of the British political establishment. The ruling classes orchestrated his defeat, but they were unsuccessful in tarnishing Corbyn's reputation for honesty and integrity.

The literal normalisation and naturalisation of Kiplingian lies have played a role in shaping and domesticating everyday lives in Britain. The persistence of otherness in British politics is evident as the current Tory Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, leads efforts to target establishments such as restaurants, car washes, nail bars,

barber shops, and convenience stores in order to apprehend so-called illegal immigrants, many of whom are among the poor and homeless. It is important to question who these individuals labelled as illegal immigrants truly are, why they have come to Britain, and the circumstances that compelled them to leave their loved ones and homes behind.

The lives and livelihoods of people in Asia, Africa, and Latin America have been devastated by colonial and neo-colonial wars, as well as neoliberal economic policies. These individuals have been sold fraudulent dreams of a better life in Britain and America, prompting them to embark on perilous journeys across treacherous waters and roads. □□□

[Contributed]

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NOTE

China is not the Alternative

Bharat Dogra writes:

AS DURING THE LAST 80 years or so the USA has been the most powerful and dominant country leading the world on a path which is exploitative towards most people and towards nature, it is only to be expected that most of those persons and groups who look for alternatives to this path are extremely critical of the policies and priorities of the USA.

Equally well-founded is the sympathy and concern for the countries and people who have been at the receiving end of the aggression of the USA. Hence there has rightly been much support and sympathy for the people of Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan in recent times even though there may be many reasons also for criticism of the regimes of these countries.

The reason why Russia deserves much support in the middle of its

present difficulties is not because of any supposed virtues of its rulers or governing systems, but because it is being targeted in a highly unjust way by the USA/NATO- dominant force which wants to weaken, bleed and destabilise Russia with the ultimate aim of being able to access its vast resources at its own terms.

Similarly China will deserve people's support and sympathy whenever it is threatened by the present day dominant imperialist force. Several well-informed strategic experts have already described how China has been encircled by the USA and some of its important allies in recent years, and like Russia it has been also at the receiving end of several unjust policy decisions and sanctions. In all such matters of injustice and aggression, China deserves the sympathy and support of all those people and groups who want to

create a new world order based on justice, peace, equality, true democracy and environment protection.

Such support for China is well-justified. However some of the more enthusiastic and misguided supporters of China are going a step too far ahead by also more or less advocating for a new path and a new world led by China. This is evident in the frequent exaggerated praise for several real as well as imagined virtues of various development and diplomacy efforts and initiatives of China.

This reminds one of the time when millions perished in famine in China at the time of 'the great leap forward' (1959-61), very much a man-made tragedy with the ruling regime contributing the most to it, but many outside observers continued to retain their lavish praise for the 'revolutionary achievements of China' even at that time! By now of course the grave harm caused to the people (particularly rural people in remote areas) at that time is even officially acknowledged in China.

In recent times China has been

increasingly and deeply integrated with the globalised capitalist system. This inevitably brought in problems such as increasing corruption, ever-increasing displacement of rural communities, ecological disruption caused by giant infra-structure projects, drawing in of weaker countries to use their resources and land for meeting the ever-increasing consumption in China while ignoring the priority needs of weaker countries.

The Chinese economic growth successes are based on an aggressive pursuit of the interests of China within a globalised capitalist system with greater integration with the same, and these should not be con-

fused with creating an alternative to the globalised capitalist system. Integrating with the globalised capitalist systems in a huge way, taking great pride in creating the biggest infra-structure and industrial projects in a hurry without considering wider issues, is inherently destructive for environment, and no amount of solar power or electric vehicle data can obscure this basic reality. What the world needs are alternatives to the globalised capitalist system, not further strengthening of this or integration to this. Those China enthusiasts who ignore all this are doing a great disservice to the alternatives movement, despite the short-term resources

they may be bringing in for the movement and thereby gaining influence. It is very important for the alternatives movement to remain deeply committed to its basic principles of justice, equality, true democracy, peace, environment protection and protection of other life forms; in the middle of its various struggles also keep searching for the path which best integrates these basic principles in a harmonious way. This is not the present-day Chinese path; the present day China has not been created on these principles. The alternatives movement must find its own brave new path.

□□□

A SURVEY

Crisis in Tea Industry of West Bengal—II

*Aswini Kumar Pramanik
Nityananda Ghosh*

THE OPINION REGARDING the industry gets different reception by the TU leaders attached to the industry. Mr Basudev Bose of AICCTU thinks that a section of garden owners particularly of non-Bengalee origin is interested in earning easy profit even at the cost of quality. This hampers the plants immensely and undermines the goodwill of the region's tea in the market. It is known to one and all that the First Flush tea is widely demanded for its taste though it's very costly. This requires the time norms to be adhered to scrupulously.

On the trade union front, some new trends are observed.

There is a major shift of workers towards right trade unions for different reasons. For example it has been noticed that a large number of workers have shifted their allegiance either to INTTUC or to BMS led trade Unions. What are the reasons behind this? Mr Bose thinks that the perspectives for shifting to the two

unions are different. As for the former, workers think that the wage increase achieved by this trade union is much more than those by the erstwhile left trade unions. The joint demand for the wage increase was Rs 257/ and the Govt. declared unilaterally Rs 232.00 which was accepted by the garden owners. This is an upward jump from the earlier increase of Rs five or ten in any wage settlement.

The management of all the gardens point to the rationing system as a leverage for checkmating the starvation deaths to a large extent. A section of trade Union leaders, however, present a different picture particularly with reference to small gardens. The Govt. of course, utilizes the garden owners' views for its propaganda purpose.

As for the shifting towards the BMS led trade unions Mr Bose thinks that it has taken place in an indirect way. The workers have first gone from CITU > Adivasi Vikas Parisad >

INTTUC > and then to BMS affiliated trade union. Here of course, the political issue has made much more impact on them than the usual trade related problems. In any case this has weakened the left trade union enrollment.

The well known left political leader and trade unionist Mr Abhijit Majumdar adds some new points. He says that the small tea gardens of below 25 acres numbering nearly fifty thousand sell their leaves to the botleaf factories. Surprisingly, these factories don't have any production unit of their own.. Regarding the rationing system, he throws some light saying that many Terai workers are deprived of ration cards. There are many whose ration cards are transformed from BPL to APL category which ultimately deprives them from getting the benefits of Antyodaya Anna Yojana. Even, he points out, there are many who are not workers at all are getting ration. He affirms that there are starvation deaths but these do not get coverage in the daily news papers for some unknown reasons.

The team moved to Mr Aloke Chakraborty, a veteran trade union leader of the tea industry. A onetime

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Tea Board member, he puts forth his opinions on related issues :

- The tea industry can survive only if the Centre and the State take combined initiatives.
- The Central Govt. has disbursed Rs 1000 cr. for replantation of the gardens, but the share of West Bengal in that fund is nil.
- In addition to rationing ,the State Govt. has arranged for crèche, hospital etc. But this cannot be a permanent solution.
- The tea gardens are not taking any steps for housing , schooling of the workers 'wards.
- The new generation male descendants are not interested in tea garden works. A section of unemployed youth is drifted towards anti-social activities which signals of future turbulence.
- One important fact is that the workers' PF contribution is deposited but the garden owners' due share is not.
- Gratuity amount, a retirement benefit is not paid even after years of retirement. There are many who even don't get it at all even in their lifetime. He proposes that there should be a mechanism like the PF which would compulsorily make the payment of both Gratuity and the PF simultaneously after retirement. He iterates that as a member of the Tea Board in 2008 ,he advanced this proposal.
- The retired workers/employees should be provided with some land on lease agreement basis so that they can engage themselves in an economic activity where even the unemployed youth can involve themselves for some financial gain.
- The State Govt. has shouldered the responsibility of sick and closed tea gardens. The Central Govt. on the other hand does almost nothing in this regard

while the huge foreign currency out of tea export is taken over by them.

He further adds that

- The area of the garden has been diminishing gradually owing to various natural disasters.
- The cost of production has gone up. The cost of machineries also skyrocketed.
- A lot of Botleaf factories needs to be closed since they are least concerned about the qualitative standard of tea. Rather the well established factories should be permitted to open one or two more new factories. He confirms that 58% of the leaves are provided by the small gardens.
- And contrary to a popular demand for patta system of garden land ,he opines that this is not a lasting solution for the workers' welfare, rather the lease system is a better alternative.
- And lastly, the skilled workers should be promoted to higher ranks since it is they who trains the trainee Asst. Managers of the gardens in their works .So the reason demands that they should get the promotions as a natural course.
- He claims that there is no starvation death now in the gardens.

His assessment of some gardens was very high as was his appreciation of some trade union leaders in the area.

The following are some relevant statistics as per Tea Statistics 2019, issued by Tea Board of India.

The third and fourth places are occupied respectively by Kenya and Sri Lanka on both counts with percentage share of production remaining far behind India.

However, in exports India lags behind Kenya, China and Sri Lanka in order of ranking with export of 2,56,060 thousand kg sharing 13.78% of world export. In earning

of foreign currency too, India ranks fourth with US \$ 780340 thousand for the same calendar year 2018.

- The present rate of wages in West Bengal is Rs 232.00 wef 01.01.2021.

The above data lead the team to come to some observations:

- Production increase doesn't necessarily ensure wage increase.
- Even if there is low cost of production ,there may be instances of closure of tea Gardens.
- The wages are lower in the highest production regions. The rate of wages in Northern Indian region is much lower than that of the Southern region where production is lower. In Assam the wage rate is Rs 167 whereas the same rate in three southern states is more than Rs300.00 each.
- The export market as well as the domestic market for Darjeeling Tea is highly bullish all the time. The demand is also all time high. Yet an internationally highly rated tea garden namely, Happy Valley Tea Garden remained closed since its workers were forced to call a strike .The reason: they were not getting salary for last two to three months. However ,the strike was withdrawn a few days later.
- The quantity and the quality of North Bengal tea supersede those

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of other regions. But the workers of these gardens don't get any extra salary for their labour. On the other hand, the workers of the Southern gardens earn more salary /wages than their counterparts in the Northern Indian gardens. But put individually, this salary is disheartening. The question is whether this salary is justifiable with the status of an organized sector employee. Less than Rs 10000 a month!

Auction Centres

The Auction Centres at some selective points also unfold the vast differences.

The Kolkata Auction Centre brought to auction some 158637 thousand kg of tea in 2018 whose average price was

CTC	: Rs 156.16 per kg
Orthodox	: Rs 200.49 per kg
Darjeeling	: Rs 434.88 per kg

In the same year Guwahati Auction Centre traded an amount of 163402 thousand kg with the following average price:

CTC	: Rs 244.37 per kg
Orthodox	: Rs 168.12 per kg

Kochin Auction Centre auctioned in the same period total amount of 47996 thousand kg with an average price of

CTC	: Rs 120.12 per kg
Orthodox	: Rs 145.09 per kg

And lastly Koonoor Auction Centre gives the similar picture for the year 2018 with an average price for 62870 thousand kg of auctioned tea:

CTC	: Rs 88.85 per kg
Orthodox	: Rs 107.16 per kg

The above data aptly demonstrate that the auction centres in Kolkata and Guwahati trade more tea both in quantity and quality than those of the largest auction centres of the South. It is therefore a riddle as to why the Darjeeling tea workers get so poor salary at least in comparison with their southern brethren particularly when they are adept in

procuring quality leaves of world fame.

Mention here may be of relevance that the gardens are leased at very low prices from the concerned Govt. Further, there are several other types of concession given to the tea gardens in West Bengal and Assam.

- The Government of West Bengal had exempted tea estates from payment of agricultural Income Tax for two financial years 2018-19 & 2019-20.
- The Green Leaf Cess exemption for several years upto 2021
- The Government of Assam also exempted the same cess upto 2021 and Agricultural Income Tax levied on 60% of the total income @ 30% .
- Income Tax on 40% of the total Income @30% plus surcharge. The same rate is charged by WB govt. also.
- 5% GST applicable to sale through auction ,private sale and Deemed Exports etc
- For Exports 5% IGST and then claim for tax refund. Or without paying IGST under Letter of Undertaking /Bond that goods have to be exported out of India within three months from the issuance of the Export Tax Invoice.

But the above source is silent on similar facilities for southern states.

Now the readers will face one more riddle : Why do the WB & Assam tea gardens get sick ,then?

- They pay less wages to their workers-less even than the unskilled agricultural workers, which is more than 260 now (approx.)
- The tea gardens are an agro-based ,organized and developed industry with long historical standing.
- The market for the industry is wide and its export market is still promising . India still stands 4th in ranking in its exports.

- More promising is its domestic market . 80% of its production is consumed by the domestic consumers. A very unique position, indeed.

Mr Mishra of Gopalpur Tea Estate was concluding that day that tea industry is still a profitable industry. Right he was in his assessment. The industry doesn't suffer from market crunch, neither domestic nor international. Some garden owners are citing higher cost of production and even referring to the case of Nepal where the same cost is much lower. This, they say, gives Nepal an advantage over India as far as export is concerned. But this reasoning is not strong enough to give others an upper hand. It bears testimony that India still ranks fourth in this regard. Moreover, the workers still get regrettably low wages. This makes essentially the most expensive factor (i.e. wages) less expensive for the garden owners.

The welfare measures, moreover, have become almost non-existent. In most of the gardens ,there are no schools, no hospitals, and of course, no responsibility for housing or its maintenance. The expenses toward coal provisioning have gone off in an environment of gas supply. The only benefit in this count is some quantity of tea leaves every month for the worker's consumption.

Then the percentage of profit must increase. And it vindicates Mr Mishra's assessment rightly.

- This is the only lucrative factor which attracts the builders/speculators to venture in the tea industry and instead of being planters they turn into builders/profiteers and causes the destruction of industry in no time. And they sell the garden and leave for greener pasture.
- There is lack of modernization of the garden and industry. The very outlook of the speculators makes the reinvestment of profit a non-

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starter. The profit walks to some other state ,some other industry leaving the garden in a state of stagnation. Sickness ? It can't be too far away.

- Transfer of garden is a chronic disease of this industry. The transfer ensures those of the negative conditions too. The case of Dima Tea Estate where the non-payment of workers' dues creates a negative milieu. It has its chain reaction on the production environment also.
- The provision of rationing may help reduce the starvation death to a large extent. But it has not been extended to all the small and sick gardens where it is needed most.

The trade union leaders affirm that all the workers of the fifty thousand small tea gardens have not been categorized as BPL card holders. A lot many have been re-converted to APL card holders. The vast quantitative difference in dole-out of rations and sundry other benefits make the APL card holders less fortunate. The process may add some grease to the propaganda machinery by this re-conversion to prove that so many people have risen above BPL. Ultimately, the government, the garden owners and the political system get benefitted by this act.

- But the question is-why do the workers of this organized sector

Table 1

Gardens :No	All India	South India	West Bengal	Assam
Large	1569	242	451	765
Small	210225	54262	37365	101085
Total	211794	54504	37816	101850
Total Area (ha)	636557.10	100928.03	148121.74	337690.35
Permanent Worker	702832	60459	242294	391404
Casual Worker	462983	14720	98341	342243
Total No of Workers	1165815	75179	340635	733647

Out of this total No of workers, male workers comprise 486768 and women workers 679047.

The data for W Bengal and Assam are : M - 134506 W- 206129 = 340635
: M - 316420 W - 417227 = 733647

The same for South India : M - 29036 W - 46143 = 75179

Source: Tea statistics 2019 Workers in Organized Sector-Baseline Survey 2018.

It is to be mentioned that India stands Second to China as far as Area coverage and production are concerned.

	Area (ha)	Production Upto 2018 ('000 kg)	Calendar year
China	30,30,000	26,16,000	44.36% of World Production
India	6,36,557	13,38,630	22.70% of World Production

Table 2

Current State-wise Wages of Tea Garden Workers as on April 01, 2019

Sl. No.	Name of the State	Rate of Daily Wages	Effective Date
01	Assam Valley/ cachar	Rs 167/ 145	01.03.2018
02	W Bengal-Dooars, Terai, Darjeeling	Rs 176	01.10.2018
03	Tripura	Rs 105	01.05.2017
04	Tamilnadu	Rs 311.83	April'19- June'19
05	Kerala	Rs 333.56	Aoril'19- June'19
06	Karnataka	Rs 324.62	April'19 - March'20
07	Himachal Pradesh	Rs 210.00	April 2016
08	Uttarakhand	Rs 230.00	June 2016

Source: Tea Statistics 2019, Pp 212

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industry of nearly two centuries get so paltry amount of wages? And why is this starvation deaths, now and then? Is it not the corporate responsibility to pay at least a salary to its workers enabling them to survive for themselves and their family? Is starvation death, then, their inevitable destiny—sometimes in a slow motion and sometime as an endemic? If rationing provision is stopped owing to certain policy decision of the Government, the starvation death will recur. Since salary is insufficient for survival, and the Government can't enforce a survival salary, they have to be a permanent dole-payer for this industry. Can they avert this role?

- The retirement benefits like PF, gratuity remain unpaid for years and the dilly dallying tactic of the individual garden owner only speaks negatively a lot of this organized sector industry and its owners. This aspect of industrial management exhibits a feudal mindset of the owners and of course, of the Government and deserves bitter criticism from all concerned. The own-

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ers are perhaps, reluctant to sever with the shameful colonial legacy of the founding years of the garden/industry.

- The crisis of the male workers in the North Bengal tea gardens may well be a total crisis of the workers in future. But no ad hoc or permanent solution is in sight so far. The poor salary i.e. Rs 5000 to 7000 a month doesn't ensure their enrolment as workers in the garden, nor does it ensure their two meals a day, let alone their future.

The trade union leaderships are demanding a minimum of Rs 21000 pm for a worker in unorganized sector industry. It is beyond conception how much they will demand for a worker in a labour intensive organized sector like tea industry.

- The modernization of the tea industry should be encouraged with utmost sincerity by the Governments. Different type of incentives should be provided as in Jute industry, for this purpose. The real planters, not the speculative businessman, should be given this opportunity so that urgent modernization particularly in the processing section takes place to streamline the production cost. This is a peremptory precondition for the export based tea gardens to remain competitive in the export market. After all, bulk of foreign currency is earned from this sector and is appropriated by the Central Government.

- The investment is dependent on Bank loans. The businessman takes the bank loans for this purpose but diverts it to some other industry. There arise the crisis in working capital and resultant sickness in this industry as well as in other ones. The NPA (Non performing Asset) phenomenon derails not only the Banking sector but the whole

economy. There is hardly any way out from this situation.

- The difficulty in assessing the quantum of production in any garden is acutely felt. Had it been the auction process alone, it would have been easier to determine the same from this particular segment. But there are individual sales counters of every garden. In fact, no garden provides a correct picture of their production. How could then the trade union leadership come to know of the production, profit etc on the basis of which they will negotiate in the collective bargaining process. This is one space where the gardens play a mysterious role. Secondly, the auction centre determines one price rate which is different from that of the private sales counters. There is then the difficulty in determining the total sales. However, these are very important indicators of the balance sheet which are not only required for the data base but are essential for salary negotiation too. Whether this data base can be achieved by any Central agency through any mechanism is hard to foretell given the vested interests of umpteen players active in the field for nearly two centuries.

The tea industry has always been haunted by acute problems. The historically underpaid workers have been fighting for the survival of the garden wherein their own survival is involved. The reverse-migration of the workers of the early days did countenance horrific brutality and the ill fated survivors were forced to come back to the garden to face more criminal torture and exploitation of the colonial masters. Their search for a living with dignity has been as illusive as ever.

The problems in the industry persist with no solution in the far

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sight. The problems in the eighties of the last century are identical with those of the present decade. The speculative business men of the time are still trampling the voices of the workers and controlling the reins of the industry as well. An ardent reader will still hear the echoes of the crises of that time in the green fields of the garden today: "The loss in the industry is not due to the competition among the tea producing countries nor due to the British tilt towards the European Common market, but the entry of the speculative profiteering motive has cost the industry to lose its credibility in the international market. These dishonest business groups have shown fic-

titious rise of production cost on the one hand, and excessive production without concern for future of the tea industry, export of low quality tea or adulterated tea on the other have contributed to the loss of fame in the international market.... The genuine tea growers have been grossly affected for these speculator businessmen." (quoted from Uttarbanger Adivasi cha shramiker Samaaj o Sanskriti- The society and culture of the Adivasi Tea Workers of North Bengal by Samir Chakraborty pp 59). It seems the time has stopped there in 1981. Otherwise how can the same old hackneyed features find its repetition in the present decade? History waits for its re-writing

, certainly. The 171st Report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Trade captioned "Issues Affecting Indian Tea Industry specially in Darjeeling Region" was submitted to the Members of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha with its recommendations. This may herald a positive note for the industry and its labourers, if implemented. □□□

[Concluded]

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THE UNSUNG HEROES**Foot Soldiers of Indian Freedom****Joydip Ghosal**

PSAINATH IN HIS GROUND-breaking book 'The Last Heroes: Foot Soldiers of Indian Freedom' (Penguin India) made a distinctive commencement of journey where he emphasised and stressed the roles of rural poor in the glorious freedom struggle of the country. He traversed across rural India and his interaction with common people revealed to him the sagas of 'extraordinary in ordinary' day to day lives. Many freedom fighters who laid down their lives and held aloft the flag of courage did not find mention in the official freedom fighter's list. For decades the struggle and chronicles of India's freedom movement were filled with the deeds and valours of heroes. This book by P Sainath attempted to change the trajectory. It brought into the sanctum sanctorum of history books the courage and unstinting devotion of ordinary folks. This book also brought to the fore the glaring truth that the generation who stridently marched

towards freedom gradually breathed their last.

This book documented fifteen such stories of extraordinary individuals. Hausabai Patil was part of Toofan Sena. The Sena was part of provisional government of Satara. Her father Nana Patil was part of the force that spearheaded the movement of pratisarkar. Its headquarters was in Kundal and both peasants and workers took part in that. Hausabai was a part of group of revolutionaries which was involved in the cases of arson in the dakhungalows owned by British. They looted armouries. Apart from that she also took part in the covert operation in Portuguese ruled Goa. She was unhappy with the recent developments. She felt that farmers were discriminated against in the Modi-led dispensation. Like many of her contemporaries she strived hard to achieve both independence and freedom. She was driven by the zeal to liberate the countrymen from

imperialism. A spirit laced with secularism coursed through the urge to gain freedom. Demati Dei Salihan resisted the British force with the spirit 'hard to rival'. She fought to defend her village and family against colonial forces. She challenged the imperialism, its codes and Raj. But when the author interviewed her they found to their utter astonishment that their name did not appear on the list inscribed in the pillar built in the memory of fighters in her own village. Bhagat Sigh Jhuggian, a revolutionary from Hoshiarpur, Punjab while discussing with the author declared unequivocally that there were two sets of people in August 1947. 'One set trying to kill Muslims another trying to save them from attackers.' He did not like the state of freedom for which they struggled so arduously. According to him these people had no legacy of freedom struggle. "They will destroy this country if not checked." Shobharam Gehervar found nice balance between Gandhi and Ambedkar. He remained a vocal critic of ruling dispensation. Mallu Swarajyam, a freedom fighter from Telangana exhorted the young techies

in a seminar to fight for a better society that would value justice and liberty and equality. Apart from fighting against Nizam and Rajakars they also fought against forced 'vettichakri' which was unpaid and forced labour. She called upon women to play pivotal roles against feudal forces. They rose up and asserted their own rights. Echoing the sentiment of the common people of that era 'Captain Bhau' or Ramchandra Sripati Lad said 'It is unfair to say we "looted" the train'. It was money stolen by the British rulers from the Indian people that 'we brought back.' Together with their co-fighters they inflicted the British rulers a fatal blow. He remained unsung and unhonoured by the nation he 'fought for'. But he was venerated by thousands who knew him personally because he rose up to challenge the mighty empire. N Sankariah's fight remained a fight for the hapless of the nation. No thought of personal gain did ever occur to him. He clarified to the author the major events that provided major momentum for the fight against the mightiest empire. His commitment to the downtrodden remained undiminished. His interview with P Sainath published in People's Archive of Rural India on 20th July, 2020. New DMK government led by M K Stalin presented

him ThagaisalThamizhar Award. While accepting the award he refused the cash prize. He donated the sum to chief minister's relief fund to help the victims of COVID 19. A veteran of India's freedom movement Baji Mohammed was attacked by barbarian British forces. After fifty years he was a part of peace team that visited Ayodhya during the demolition of Babri mosque. There he faced vicious attacks by communal bigots. It was painful to see Laxmi Panda of Koraput, Odisha expressed her indignation. She was trained with rifle but she never fired a bullet at anyone. Did that mean she was not a freedom fighter? She was the youngest member of INA and she participated in the camp activities in Myanmar and then called Burma). Netaji chose to address her as Indira in order to avoid confusion with famous Laxmi Sehgal.

The British authority labeled Panimora village of Bargarh village of Odisha as Badmash village. Its 32 inhabitants were sent behind the prison during the historic struggle of 1942. Ganapati Yadav served as freedom fighter in the ranks of Toofan Sena or whirlwind army in Satara, Mahaarastra. He took part in the rebellions against the British imperialism. Freedom fighter Doreswamy continued his tireless struggle even

at the fag end of his life. During his struggle against mighty British Empire he launched one newspaper after another. British forcefully shut the newspapers. The imperialists aimed at curbing criticisms by implementing draconian acts. In 2020 he had to face vicious attack by ruling Hindutva brigade. Even an MLA of the ruling dispensation claimed that he was never a part of the freedom struggle. His admirers published a bulletin responding to the attack titled 'A Gaandhivaadhi replies to Godsevaadi' to combat the barrage of invectives. Thelu and Lokkhi Mahato, R Nallakannua and Bhabani Mahato were the hero and heroines who were not feted or felicitated. But they were the embodiment of valour and sacrifice.

The uniqueness of the book was that it covers various people cutting across different sections of society who spearheaded the struggle against the British. This book is a fitting tribute to the fighters of India's independence in 75 years. P Sainath indefatigably chronicles the fighting spirit of common men, village folks that aspect seemed to have disappeared from people's consciousness. As freedom and independence is not the same thing the post-1947 generations need their stories to understand the real worth of both these words. □□□

MODI'S US VISIT

Diplomatic Hype or What?

Nilofar Suhrawardy

NOTWITHSTANDING THE diplomatic importance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's US visit (June 20-24) from the Indian perspective, one is compelled to deliberate on it from a few other angles. The importance being given to it in Indian circles is partly suggested by media at home accord-

ing substantial attention to it from around a week before the visit has actually begun. In comparison, the American media has yet (June 16-18) to pay significant attention to the same. There is nothing surprising about this. The unwritten rule of Indian leader's US-visit dominating Indian headlines days ahead of the

visit has always been the trend. In contrast, the coverage by American media is primarily confined to when the visit actually begins. As of now, charges against former President Donald Trump, Ukraine-crisis, candidates in fray for Presidential elections and other issues linked primarily with the West are in the news. To a degree, Indian media's coverage is suggestive of hype made about their leaders' visit to United States being repeated once again.

Nevertheless, that Modi is visiting United States on an invitation and

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that this is a state-visit bears its diplomatic significance. Certainly, US President Joe Biden wouldn't have indulged in this diplomatic exercise without any reason. There is no denying that US is not at all pleased about diplomatic courtesies being extended elsewhere towards Russia, China as well as Iran. While prospects of United States' ties with Russia and Iran heading towards normalisation in the near future seem fairly bleak, the same cannot be said about relations with China. At least, this is suggested by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit (June 18-19) to Beijing. Irrespective of whether two countries resolve their disputes or not, his visit signals their desire to at least extend diplomatic hands towards each other.

Considering that at present ties between India and China cannot be viewed as friendly, the timing of Blinken's Beijing visit just ahead of Modi's to United States does demand a little attention. Perhaps, United States is not too concerned about India's diplomatic ties with China, Russia, Iran and other countries. There is yet another aspect, US-China economic ties have barely been affected by tension between them. Reports indicate that their bilateral trade hit a record high in 2022 with their imports and exports adding to \$690.6bn. These points are being mentioned in view of United States' diplomatic moves towards India being referred to in certain circles as a "counterweight" to China. Economically, this will certainly take some more time. At present, Blinken's China-visit definitely rules out this option. The hard reality that even India-China trade ties have not been affected by diplomatic tension between the two countries cannot be ignored.

In lieu of Ukraine-crisis, prospects of India changing its diplomatic stand on the issue due to Modi's US-visit may be viewed as minimal. The issue is certainly reported to be on agenda and will be

discussed but nothing much is expected beyond that. True, Western countries would welcome lesser dependence of India on Russian imports, but this is least likely. Russia remains a leading supplier of crude oil to India. Besides, India and Russia aim to strengthen their economic ties and are also considering a free trade deal, as indicated by talks between the two countries.

The preceding point suggests that diplomatic "warmth" displayed by US and India towards each other during Modi's visit cannot be viewed as a sign of New Delhi turning its back towards Moscow. At present, Russia is India's fifth largest trade partner with US being the number one followed by China, UAE and Saudi Arabia. Economically, even if Modi's visit is marked by talks and/or agreements about stronger economic cooperation, it is difficult to view it as a major step forward as US is already India's largest trading partner.

Given that as per United States' diplomatic protocol, heads of state visiting the country on invitation are given a 21-gun salute, this courtesy is being extended to Modi also. In 2009, during his state visit to US at the invitation of the then President Barack Obama, then Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh was given a 21-gun salute. Obama and Singh also held a joint news conference at the White House during latter's state visit. So far, Modi's packed schedule during his US-visit has not referred to Biden and him together addressing any media gathering.

A highlight of Modi's visit during Donald Trump's presidency was their sharing stage during "Shared Dreams, Bright Future" a session of "Howdy, Modi" event, at NRG stadium, Houston, Texas on September 22, 2019, where more than 50,000 Indian-Americans had gathered. This was similar to the mega event organised by Indian community in honour of his visit to US at Madison Square Garden, New York on September

28, 2014. This was Modi's first visit to US as Indian Prime Minister. He addressed a crowd of around 20,000 Indian Americans and NRIs gathered there. A similar event was apparently on the cards for this visit also but as reports indicate no mega-event, similar to this or one held at Houston in 2019 is taking place this time. Several interpretations may be drawn from this too, diplomatically speaking.

On one hand, Modi's talks scheduled with representatives of Indian Americans and their presence at celebrations organised to welcome him cannot be ignored. At the same time, some attention also needs to be paid to events suggesting the opposite. There are reports of events planned by human rights activists in protest against targeting of religious minorities, journalists and others in India. These groups have reportedly prepared fliers protesting against such communalism displayed by extremists in India and have also planned an event in New York, featuring a show called "Howdy Democracy." To a degree this is also suggestive of different views held by Indian-American Diaspora about Modi's US-visit. It would be erroneous to assume that they all have similar, positive/negative views about it.

In India, irrespective of the importance accorded to Modi's US-visit by media, this will bear significance for him and his party when the same is translated into electoral gains at different levels, from scheduled assembly to parliamentary polls. However, one cannot miss the point of Indo-US ties along with Modi's US-visits being accorded minimal attention- in comparison to claims and promises about India's progress-during BJP-stalwarts' electoral campaigns, including their fiery, aggressive speeches! □□□

(Nilofar Suhrawardy is a senior journalist and writer with specialization in communication studies and nuclear diplomacy.)

[Source: Counter currents]

REVIEW ARTICLE

‘Marginalised but not Defeated’Amit Sengupta*

THE *BOOK ‘MARGINALISED but not Defeated’ under review [is a meticulous documentation of journeys, roads and railway lines, the network of rivers and human civilisations, villages and small towns, talukas and tribal hamlets. The author, a seasoned public interest journalist, travels far and wide, among ordinary and invisible people, in remote regions, across the fragmented landscape of India. Tarun Kanti Bose writes about the demography, topography, society, politics and culture, and the anthropology and agricultural practices of civilisations who have survived the infinite difficulties of their life and times, faced with State repression or indifference, as much as the apocalyptic paradigm shifts witnessed by ecological devastation. These are the original people making the ancient and contemporary roots of the Indian inheritance, before and after the making of the Indian Constitution.

Here is an intricate description: “The Tapi River passes through Khandesh region with black soil and fertile plains along its bank. It flows east-west across the district cutting Nandurbar district into two almost equal halves. It forms the basin from the beginning of Shahada taluka which broadens into a strip of extremely fertile plains of about 15-20 miles in width at its broadest. In the north of the Shahada and Talode talukas, the plains end with a steep rise of the Satpura range which forms ridges of the rising mountains. Most of the part of Akkalkuwa taluka which bounds the Talode taluka on the west is taken up by the Satpura range with a relatively narrow strip

***MARGINALISED BUT NOT DEFEATED**

By Tarun Kanti Bose

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of the north-west basin included in the southern region. The Nandurbar district lies to the south of the Tapi River. Here the plains end with a slow rise and increasingly rocky soil that blend into the Sahyadri and Galna hills in the south-west...”

Another travel trajectory is interesting: “The Mumbai-Agra Road passes through the eastern part of Nandurbar district through Shule and Shirpur and along one of the old trade routes of India. The Mumbai-Delhi railway route passes through Jalgoan district of Khandesh region. The Surat-Bhusawal railway line follows the south bank of the river Rapi throughout the region. Prakeshe village, which lies at the confluence of the Tapi and the Gomai rivers in Shahada taluka, has been the most important nodal link in earlier days...”

So what is grown in the Khandesh region? Cereals, millets and pulses. Cotton, sugarcane, vegetables, edible fruit and spices. Oil, cotton, starch, sugar, pulses, timber, Sorghum, jowar, pearl millet, wheat, maize, rice, black gram, horse gram, mung bean, pigeon pea. Plus, sugarcane, banana and other cash crops. All in the plains, valleys, hills and forests—by the villagers and ancient adivasis. And, yet, why are the people, the locals, the inheritors of this fertile land, so transparently poor, and so brazenly exploited and oppressed, and by whom?

For instance, post-pandemic, adivasi migrant workers have nour-

ished these sugar mills owned by powerful politicians in Gujarat and MP. Tarun writes that they worked in over 100 different cooperative sugar mills, and thereby were forced to travel back to Maharashtra since the owners of the factories refused to take responsibility. The adivasis returned without their wages. No food or travel allowance was given to them.

Documenting the fisherfolk communities during the difficult and forcibly enforced lockdown, the book narrates that fisher communities, especially in Mumbai, were rendered jobless. It became difficult to make two ends meet since all the fish markets were closed till August 2020. Many of them, even later. “During the pandemic, small-scale fishers, both in the inland and marine sector, found it rough to continue fishing. Fisher folk across the west coast of India threw away their fresh fish catch. In the absence of ice, there could not be any storage. The fish could not be sold as there were neither exporters nor traders. As there were no loaders for loading and unloading of fish, the transport of stock and ice and other sundry jobs, which were labour-intensive and integral, could not be done. The fisher folk who returned from the sea did not know what to do with their stock, so they threw it away or sold it at meagre prices...”

Women, especially single women, who constitute a majority of fish vendors at markets, by the roadside, by head loading for door-to-door sale, were the hardest hit by the loss of access to fish, lack of transport. Markets and consumers. “Their day to day subsistence economy took a hit so the impact at the household level was severe.” Hence, the busiest fish markets in Mumbai – Crawford Market in south Mumbai, Sassoon Dock in Colaba, Bhaucha Dhaka near the Dockyard, and the Kasara

fish market in Thane, became quiet, with no business happening, the hustle and bustle buried in the despair and joblessness of the lockdown. This was a big crisis, and they are still trying to recover from it.

The book travels across the Hindi hinterland, onwards to the west, Gujarat and Maharashtra, then to the East, Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand, and covers the various tribal regions in the remote and sublime landscape of North-east India. It talks about the Khasis, Nagas, Karbis, Garos, Rabhas, Misings,

Daflas, Bodos, Akas and others in the North-east. It enters the invisible lives of the Santhals, Mundas, Hos, Kharias, Paherias, Oraons, Mundas, Bhils, Gonds, Kols, Koyas, Todas, Banjaras, etc in the Central Provinces, in Dandakaranya and Jharkhand, among the 550 tribal communities in India.

The book documents the hard and difficult struggle to implement the Forest Rights Act, how the oppressed adivasis have united into forest unions, how they are now entering into new thresholds of pro-

tracted struggles and victories in a non-violent manner. The mainstream development paradigm is being questioned and new rainbows of collective, community reassertions are happening across the tribal belt in India. More so, in most cases, led by brave, empowered and resilient women.

That is why the name of the book: *Marginalised but not Defeated*. A must for all young journalists, social science students, editors, civil society groups and the academia. □

[Source: countercurrents.org]

SEARCHING FOR ROOTS

What Ails Indian Communist Movement?

T Vijayendra

A LOT OF ORDINARY people in India—both women and men have a lot of respect for the communists and the communist-led mass movement. It is based on their direct knowledge from interactions with the communists in trade union agitations and other social and political movements. They are also impressed by the personal integrity of most of the communists. They are prepared to overlook aberrations of some of them.

They are puzzled as to why the communists had so little success. What went wrong? How did they get isolated? What major mistakes did they commit?

Many individuals were impressed by the news of the Russian Revolution by the early 1920s and some Indians living abroad also became communists. But it was the 1929 Great Depression that spread the idea of communism all over the world. It proved Marx's prediction of periodic crisis of capitalism. But what impressed people was that the Soviet Union was unaffected by this crisis. The miseries that these events brought and the strikes by the work-

ers gave birth to the communist movement in India.

However by that time the Indian National Movement had picked up energy and Gandhi was already established as a leader. Many early communists came from this movement and were influenced by Gandhi. They left Congress and Gandhi because Gandhi was rabidly anti-communist. Gandhi never talked about the Soviet Union or Socialism. He never visited the Soviet Union whereas most leaders did. Instead he went to the fascist Mussolini in December 1931, and even took a salute by his Blackshirts although his friend Romain Rolland advised him against going to Italy. Gandhi was opposed to class struggle and believed in class collaboration. He used the terms violence (for class struggle) and non-violence (for class collaboration) in his own way for them. This effectively hid his agenda. Instead he talked about trusteeship where the rich were supposed to be the trustees of their wealth and property. Acharya Dharmanand Kosambi pointed out that there is a contradiction between Gandhi's belief in 'Aparigraha' (non accumula-

tion) and trusteeship. But Gandhi did not bother about it. However many leftist remained in Congress and formed the Congress Socialist Party which later changed to various socialist parties.

This background was a heavy chain around the feet of the communists. They adopted some of Gandhi's moral stands like celibacy, vegetarianism and anti-alcohol ideas. This isolated them from ordinary workers and the communist movement got dominated by upper castes.

The Second World War turned into a fascist people's war as Hitler attacked the Soviet Union. The Indian communists could not join the Quit India movement against the British because England was part of the anti-fascist alliance. This created a lifelong rift with the Socialists, who were normally allies of the communists. Secondly, they got isolated from the Indian Mass Movement of Quit India. Thirdly, Indian mass imagination was captivated by Subhash Chandra Bose's Indian National Army. But since Bose was taking the help of the fascist Japan, the Indian Communists could not support him! All this isolated the Indian communists further.

The Indian National Movement was dominated by upper caste Hindus. The lower castes had no place

in it. It was Dalit leader, Dr B R Ambedkar who successfully brought up the caste question and got some gains for the Dalits. His contribution, both in theory and practice, was formidable.

Communists have often been accused of not understanding the caste question. They thought that it was mainly a social question, belonging to the 'superstructure' of the society. They often relegated it to a 'social reform' kind of activity. Abolition of untouchability, inter caste marriage, discrimination in public places like hotels, schools etc. They thought this social evil will automatically vanish with the progress of industrialisation.

They never understood Ambedkar's definition of caste as 'closed class'. What he meant was that caste is a class where endogamy or marriage outside the caste is prohibited. D D Kosambi compared castes to medieval guilds of Europe.

In practice also the communists made major mistakes. In the Textile industry of Bombay the Dalits were not allowed some jobs where they had to join the broken thread with the saliva of their mouth. The reason was they were considered untouchables. The communist union, the Girni Kamgar Union did not take the side of the Dalits. Ambedkar was also active in the Bombay labour movement. He argued for abolition of this prejudice. The Union agreed with great reluctance. This created a lifelong distance between the communists and Dalits.

Today Dalit intellectual Anand Teltumble maintains that the classical caste divisions among Dalits have vanished. They are all landless labourers and they should unite as a class. In Delhi and in some other places, left wing student leaders are trying hard to create a unity among Dalits and communists.

India is a federal reality. The

tension between central and state is one of the main driving forces of Indian polity. India is more like Europe with different regions and languages. In addition India also has ten developed scripts each with a significant printing history.

Unfortunately Indian political parties, including the communists refuse to accept this reality. For them India is a nation and it has to have a National language, which some want it to be Hindi. This has created enormous obstacles in the practical political work of the communist party in India and often resulted in losses. For example they have no clear line about supporting a demand for a separate state within the Indian Union—like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Uttarakhand. There are at least ten such movements waiting on the side and the communist have no clear stand on it. During the three movements mentioned above there was confusion among the communists and it was rebel leaders like A K Roy (in Jharkhand) and Shankar Guha Niyogi in Chhattisgarh who supported. Earlier in Samyukta Maharashtra and Telugu Desam movement the communists joined opportunistically and suffered heavy losses among their ranks.

Part of the confusion is due to Stalin's thesis identifying nations with language. So although the Soviet Union was a federation, Russia was a dominant nation within it and the Russian language dominated. The Indian Constitution has some federal aspects but it is mainly unitary. This was the main reason for the formation of Pakistan. GST is just another example of this unitary trend.

Due to the anti fascist movement a lot of democratic tendencies came in academics. Today the position is:

1. All languages are equal. There is nothing called a dialect.

2. The standard language is a language with a gun.

Thus not only all Indian languages are equal, but even the so-called dialects are also equal. The Pune Marathi is considered standard as Pune was the centre of power during the Peshwas. Today's Maharashtra has five ecoregions: Desh (Western Ghats, Pune is located here), Konkan (Coastal Maharashtra), Marathwada (Central, with Aurangabad as its main city), Vidarbha (North East Maharashtra with Nagpur as its main city) and Khandesh (North West Maharashtra). A thumb rule is that each ecoregion has a language and a potential nation/nationality! So the demand for Vidarbha as a separate state has been there for many years. This author has estimated that there are 65 such ecoregions and India can have a federation of 65 states! British India had nearly five hundred local kings and states! If one wants to imagine a Federation of South Asia it will be nearly 100 states!

It will be good if the communist party units have organisations at a local eco-zone basis. They should be good in knowing the local language, culture, folklore, agriculture and industry etc. Then they will be effective.

Communists have an exemplary tradition in opposing communalism and supporting secularism.

For one thing communalism is not uniformly spread all over the country though the Hindutva outfit would like it to be so. One should understand its origins. Essentially it has roots in the 19th century Hindu renaissance and it was mainly located in North West India and Bengal. It was essentially a movement of educated Hindu middle class. It had three components: 1. responding to the Christian missionary's criticism against the 'evils' of Hinduism. They wanted to shed some 'bad' texts and practices and wanted jobs in the new Company Raj 2. It was

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pro-British and rabidly anti-Muslim. 3. The British played the 'divide and rule' policy. They made Persian as the language of the courts as it was already there since the Mughal time and naturally Muslims had more jobs in the new situation.

Communists should recognise this history and concentrate on making the rest of India communal tension free.

Lenin in his book, 'State and Revolution' urged comrades to read anarchist literature to have a good critic of the State. The idea was that comrades will understand that Socialism was only a phase in the development of history and the next stage will be anarchism! One might as well define anarchism as one goes along to avoid misunderstanding. Briefly: 1. Anarchists are opposed to all authority, 2. Anarchists believe in self-management within a local community on the basis of 'a free association of free people', and 3. The Anarchist community will federate with other communities also on the basis of 'a free association of free people'.

What does it mean in practice? Communist organisations should implement 'self-management' in their organisations. Thus trade unions or peasant organisations in their structure and functioning should be 'so-

cialist' and 'democratic' and not hierarchical copying the ruling class! There is an urgent need that the communist should drop their antipathy towards anarchism and treat it as part of their programme. Chomsky does this and many other progressives are doing this.

The world is going through a deep crisis. It is a global emergency and the capitalist system is on the verge of collapse and life on earth is endangered. This began with the 2008 financial meltdown and is exasperated by global warming and resource depletion. The capitalist response is the so-called 'Fourth Industrial Revolution'. No mainstream political parties, including the communist parties have a proper alternative. They cannot get out of the agenda of industrialisation or development.

There are a lot of independent groups who are talking and practising alternatives and asking for stopping the development projects and asking for de-growth.

Masses or people who have experienced the ill effects of these policies have been protesting for a long time. From the early seventies, in the wake of revolutionary movements that started in the late 60s the consciousness about the evils of development began to grow. One of

the earliest was the Silent Valley Movement in the Palakkad district of Kerala. It was started in 1973 to save the Silent Valley Reserve Forest from being flooded by a hydroelectric project. Since then there have been movements in practically every state in India. For example, Koel Karo movements in Jharkhand, Narmada Bachao Andolan spread over three states, Niyamgiri movement in Odisha, and Save Western Ghats which also was spread over several states and so on. While in most cases the movements 'failed' to achieve their goals, they transformed millions of people in their attitude towards 'development'. These movements have prepared grounds for the alternatives to emerge – organic farming, education, health care, water harvesting, local self sufficiency etc.

The so-called mainstream political parties have not participated or supported these movements in any significant way. Some units of the far left have supported and rebels in parties or some members of the opposition parties have also supported once in a while. In West Bengal the CPI (M) lost power due to their blatant support of the capitalist development agenda.

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LETTERS

'Love Jihad'

To a specific question on 'love jihad' during the press conference, the senior BJP leader Pankaja Munde said it has never been an agenda for the central government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "No such subject as 'love jihad' has even been on the agenda of the Modi government. The discussions are always centred on development and redevelopment. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's focus is to put the country on the road to development and progress in the next 25 years," said Munde.

However, on May 16, Madhya

Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said his government took a serious view of 'love jihad', 'religious conversion' and promotion of 'terrorist activities' and won't allow such practices in the state. CM Chouhan made the remark while speaking to reporters on the recent action taken by the Madhya Pradesh Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) against members associated with the radical Islamic organisation, Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT), in the state capital Bhopal.

"Ahead of the Gujarat Assembly elections last year, the BJP had promised to bring a law against 'love jihad'.

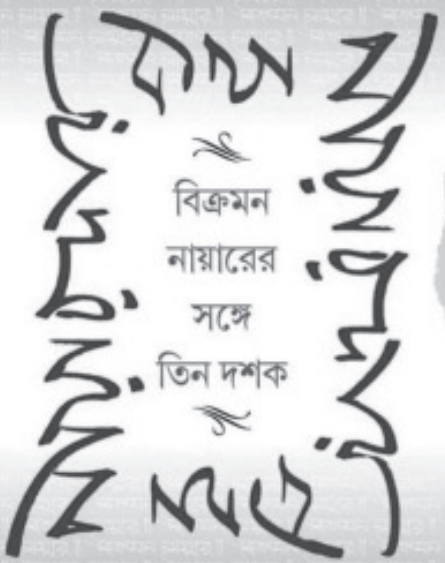
Hritika Mitra, Jabalpur

Groundwater

Humans have pumped enough water from underground reservoirs to shift Earth's geographic North Pole at a speed of 4.36 centimetres per year. The motion of atmospheric masses and water masses during seasonal changes causes the planet's poles to naturally wobble by up to several metres every year. But to fully explain how much the axis has tilted between 1993 and 2010, human-made groundwater shifts have to be taken into account. More than 2 trillion tons of water were depleted from underground reservoirs during that time, particularly for irrigation in northwestern India and western North America.

Nature

মানস ভট্টাচার্য



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