

# frontier

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## *'Land is Costlier than Gold'*

**E**UPHORIA OVER RAM IS VIRTUALLY OVER. WHAT IS NOT over is hysteria created by the saffron brigade around the Temple in Ayodhya. They hope to derive enormous dividends in the coming parliamentary elections from their obnoxious 'Ram Lila' or 'Ram Opera'. The Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP] was originally a north India-centric party of traders—a Bania party with strong feudal roots and religious orthodoxy. With changing times, they have also changed by making them acceptable to big business replacing the grand old party Congress. Now they are the darling of top corporate houses and Ram has opened up huge business potential, particularly in tourism and real estate sectors in Ayodhya. Not for nothing the billionaires and millionaires came from distant places to appreciate Modi's spiritual hub built over the wounded psyche of the minority community.

The Temple City will be constructed at a cost of 65 billion rupees [\$78.23 m]. Realising the prospects of trade and commerce in Ayodhya on its way becoming an important Hindu pilgrimage centre for millions of Hindus globally, the BJP state government of UP with the tacit patronage from the Centre, has since 2020 acquired 1,407 acres of land from about 12,00 farmers. Land prices have been skyrocketing in Ayodhya and its neighbourhood since the apex court's verdict in favour of temple crusaders. 'Land in Ayodhya today is costlier than gold'. But farmers were forced to sell their small parcels of land to government at below the prevailing market rates. Then allegations of forcible encroachment by land mafia in collaboration with government officials are rampant. And again the minority community people are adversely affected.

The Sunni Central Waqf Board in a statement said 'more than 200 properties belonging to the Board, including cemeteries, mosques and idgahs [places of public worship] have already been encroached on' by the realtors who have moved into the area in the past decade for commercial purposes, mainly for the building of guest houses and hotels. The Ayodhya Development Authority, however, strongly contested the allegation of encroachment, saying 'they didn't receive any complaints on the matter'. It's not that easy to summon energy to make complaints to the authorities in Yogi Adityanath's fiefdom, if the complainants belong to the minority community.

In 2014, the BJP promised 'better days'. And in 2019, they highlighted

the Balakot strike against terrorist camps in Pakistan while fanning jingoism across the country and projecting Modi as a dynamic and decisive leader with global reach, to marginalise opposition in electoral rat race. In 2024 God Ram is their trump card. Even President Droupadi Murmu in her customary speech delivered on the eve of the 75th Republic Day [January 26] said 'future historians will consider it (Ram Temple) a landmark in India's continued rediscovery of its civilisational heritage'. In other words Modi will be remembered as

one of the discoverers of that heritage! There are so many Ram temples throughout the country but to them 'Ayodhya' symbolises Hindu pride, albeit religious bigots do hardly understand that 'their false pride is at stake'. The political opposition in the country is hopelessly directionless. They are trapped by the BJP in the Hindutva framework and Modi-scripted Ramayana. They have no answer to the systematic saffronisation of polity while people in the street don't know where to go. Unemployment is rising, and the rich-poor di-

vide is increasing alarmingly. When people have no jobs and no money to buy essentials, Hindutva plank is bound to crack. But opposition parties have no positive approach to the pressing problem; they are more concerned about seat - sharing, not the ideological onslaught launched by Modi and his party. 'People are said to be blaming themselves for the tough situation they are in', not Modi. It is certainly an achievement of the BJP-led Government. Opposition is simply wandering in wilderness. □□□  
26-01-2024

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## COMMENT

### Refugees Everywhere

TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY CONFLICTS have already created millions of refugees. In fact, by mid-year 2023, the U.N. High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) put the number at 36.4 million worldwide, a number that has doubled in just the last seven years. Three countries alone—Syria (6.5 million), Afghanistan (6.1 million), and Ukraine (5.9 million)—accounted for 52% of all external refugees in 2023.

In truth those 36.4 million refugees only include people officially registered with the UNHCR (30.5 million) or with UNWRA, the U N Works Relief Agency for Palestinians in the Near East (5.9 million). UNWRA was created in 1952, specifically to serve people displaced in the formation of Israel in 1948. Unlike the UNHCR, it provides direct service to registered Palestinian refugees and their descendants in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), and Gaza.

And that figure doesn't even include the majority of people fleeing war and other systemic and climate violence, who are "internally displaced persons". They are not counted as refugees in the legal

sense because, while they've lost their homes, they still remain inside their own national borders. There were 62.2 million internally displaced persons when the UNHCR issued that mid-2023 report.

According to the UNHCR, "Low- and middle-income countries host 75% of the world's refugees and other people in need of international protection." Furthermore, "the Least Developed Countries provide asylum to 20% of the total."

The Tory government in London has come up with a perverse scheme to potentially ship any asylum seekers approaching Great Britain by boat to Rwanda for "processing" in return for financial support of various kinds. (In November 2023, that country's Supreme Court nixed the plan, but in December the government signed a new agreement with Rwanda, which it claims will satisfy the court's objections to the agreement.)

The two countries taking in the most refugees at the moment are Iran and Turkey, at 3.4 million each, followed by Germany and Colombia at 2.5 million each and Pakistan at 2.1 million.

Right now refugees are being created in enormous numbers with no apparent end in sight in two regions--Gaza and Sudan. For Gaza people around the world just can't take their eyes off at the moment (and for good reason!), while Sudan seems almost entirely forgotten.

Since Hamas's vicious and criminal October 7th attack on targets in Israel, the world has focused intently on events in Israel-Palestine. The UNHCR's 2023 report was compiled before the attack and Israel's subsequent and ongoing genocidal destruction of Gaza, which has seen the deaths of more than 21,000 Gazans (a majority of them women and children) and the loss of more than half of its housing stock and three-quarters of its 36 hospitals. In one sense, Gaza's residents are not new refugees. More than 85% of its pre-war population of 2.3 million are now "merely" considered internally displaced. Yes, they have been starved, deprived of medical care and potable water, harried by bombs and missiles falling on homes and temporary shelters from one part of that 25-mile-long strip of land to the other, and forced into an ever-shrinking area near Gaza's southern border with Egypt. Still, for now they remain in Gaza with nowhere else to go.

While the world has watched

Gaza's decimation in horror, an even larger refugee crisis in the African nation of Sudan has gone almost unremarked upon. In 2019, a massive nonviolent movement of Sudanese civilians led to a military coup against longtime dictator Omar Bashir. While the military initially agreed to hand power over to civilian rule in two years, by October 2021, its leaders had declared their

intention to remain in power, while the United States, despite rhetoric supporting civilian rule, stood idly by. Since then, war between the military government and a paramilitary group, the Rapid Support Forces, has displaced 4.5 million or more within Sudan, while another 1.2 million have fled to neighbouring countries. □□□

[Contributed]

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#### NOTE

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## Leprosy in India

*T Vijayendra writes:*

**J**ANUARY 30 IS OBSERVED as World Leprosy Day. To a common man leprosy is repulsive. The site of poor beggars in rags having deformities makes people turn their back with horror. Some hastily throw some coins without looking at them. If you happen to go near their settlements in some hidden corners of the city, the site is equally disheartening.

However, leprosy is one of the least infectious diseases as nearly everyone has some measure of natural resistance against it. India has 60% of world's leprosy patients. 120,000 to 130,000 new cases of leprosy are reported every year in India. This is 58.8% of the global total of new cases.<sup>1</sup> So it is a matter of serious concern for us.

Most people do not know anything about leprosy.

Leprosy or Hansen's disease is a chronic infectious disease caused by a bacillus, *Mycobacterium leprae* (m leprae), which multiplies slowly and has a long incubation period, on an average, 5-7 years. Symptoms may occur within 1 year but can also take as long as 20 years or even more. It is an ancient disease and has been endemic in India. The earliest remains of the disease have been discovered at the Indus Valley

Civilization. Infection can lead to involvement of the nerves, respiratory tract, skin, and eyes. The nerve damage may result in a lack of ability to feel touch, pressure, pain, heat and cold, which may lead to the loss of parts of a person's extremities from repeated injuries or infection. An infected person may experience muscle weakness and poor eyesight. Persons affected and their families also experience stigma and discrimination.<sup>2</sup>

Despite running one of the largest leprosy elimination programmes in the world, India reported more than 100,000 new cases in 2019—more than half of the global total.

Why does leprosy persist in India? The reasons are myriad.

Back in 2005, the Indian government was optimistic about its success turning back the ancient disease. That year, the government announced that it had reached WHO's target for elimination of the disease as a public health problem by bringing cases down to less than 1 per 10,000 people. However, the proclamation didn't mean that leprosy was eliminated altogether. *Mycobacterium leprae*, the bacterium that causes leprosy, was still being transmitted in the population. Unfortunately, the government chose

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that moment to dial back its efforts. Once leprosy ceased to be a high-profile public health concern, the government stopped actively seeking out cases, frontline workers say. On the cusp of victory, it shifted attention and resources elsewhere—a familiar tale in global public health. The strict contact tracing for leprosy patients that had been a cornerstone of the country's National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP) has slowed considerably, says Utpal Sengupta, PhD, a research scientist and a consultant at The Leprosy Mission India, the country's largest NGO focused on leprosy relief.<sup>3</sup>

From the very early times Christian missionaries and voluntary organisations have done pioneering work in leprosy eradication. Leprosy colonies exist throughout India. These are typically made up of patients that have moved to the colony from a significant distance away, and their children and grandchildren. These colonies have a very strong community bond, formed in reaction to outside discrimination and stigma.<sup>1</sup> This helps the voluntary organisations

who put in enormous efforts in helping them.

Dhanbad district in Jharkhand has been severely affected from the beginning. A voluntary organisation, Swabhiman has done some remarkable work. There are 20 such success stories in the reference cited below.<sup>4</sup> Several other organisations in different parts of India have simi-

lar stories. The government too has a new strategy for 2023-2027 and they hope to achieve elimination of leprosy as a disease with zero new cases reported for at least three consecutive years. □□□

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#### 'MAKE IN INDIA'

## 'Much Ado about Nothing'

*Jayakhosh Chidambaran*

ON SEPTEMBER 24, 2014, amidst customary fanfare and sloganeering, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, signed an ambitious 'Make in India' programme, ostensibly to transform India into a global manufacturing hub. Modi's grandiose plan had three objectives—to catapult the Indian manufacturing sector to 25 percent of GDP by 2022 (revised to 2025), to register and sustain 12-14 percent year-on-year (YOY) growth and to create an additional 100 million jobs by 2022.

The 'Make in India' programme is now in its tenth year. However, none of its goals have materialised. The Modi government that thrives on its gargantuan PR machinery and event management is uncharacteristically silent on its dismal outcomes, rather abysmal failures.

In truth, the manufacturing sector has declined. The manufacturing growth rate has averaged around 5.9 percent since 2014, lower than the bench marked 12-14 percent, and the share of manufacturing remained stagnant at 16.4 percent of GDP.

The labour force representation in the manufacturing decreased from 12.6 percent in 2011-'12 to 11.6 percent in 2021-2022. The Index of Industrial Production [IIP] data, which tracks growth in multiple in-

dustrial groups within the Indian economy, indicates a modest 2.0 percent cumulative growth, in the manufacturing sector from years 2013-'14 through 2022-'23.

A sector-wise break-up of growth within the manufacturing industry represents a bleak outlook; growth in electrical equipment manufacturing averaged (-) 1.8 percent since 2013-'14, and computer, electronics, and optical products growth stagnated at 2 percent. The transport equipment industry registered a paltry 2.3 percent growth, and so did motor vehicles at 1.6 percent. Conventional employment-generating sectors of textile, apparel and leather industries underperformed (-) 0.5 percent, 1.2 percent and (-) 1.8 percent, respectively. To put things into perspective, the number of cars sold in 2020 was the same as in 2012.

Contrary to the hyperbolic declaration of creating 100 million jobs in the manufacturing sector by 2022, India ruefully lost 24 million jobs between 2017 and 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic and the government's response to a stringent curfew-like lock-down aggravated the manufacturing sector's woes.

Even before the draconian lock-down and closure of economic activity, 11 million manufacturing jobs were already lost before the pan-

demic ravaged the nation. This was primarily due to a "twin-balance sheet" problem, adversely impacting the balance-sheets of corporates banks simultaneously, replete with nonperforming assets. Corporate loans dried up, and consequently, private investments as a percentage of GDP—a key engine of economic growth—fell substantially.

Private investments are a factor of four critical variables: profitability, capacity utilisation, consumer demand and availability of credit. Capacity utilisation fluctuated between 60-70 percent which is grossly inadequate for manufacturing companies to commit to new plants and machinery and upgrade existing ones when capacity touches around 90 percent, substantiated by buoyant demand.

Consumer demand, especially rural household consumption, has witnessed a downward trend due to unemployability, falling incomes and subsequent demand depression. This is exacerbated by high inflation, a deterrent for private investments in the economy since monetary policy corrections to subvert inflation always raise the cost of capital.

Despite the finance ministry slashing corporate taxes for resident companies to 25 percent in the 2019-20 budget and to promote entrepreneurial spirit in the country, corporate taxes for new businesses at only a meagre 15 percent. Yet, these supply-side incentives could not persuade Indian corporates and entrepreneurs

to galvanise new investments and spur economic growth. In 2019, 12.5 million people applied for 35,000 railway jobs, a testimony to the distress prevalent in the job market.

In the past few years, the share of the labour force in agriculture has increased due to the dearth of urban and semi-urban employment opportunities. An Azim Premji University report, 'State of Working India' revealed that 42 percent of graduates under the age of 25 are currently unemployed. A recent Periodic Labour Force Survey revealed that 58 percent of the workforce (95 million) are self-employed, which contrary to SBI economists' citing robust entrepreneurial activity and structural transformation in the labour force are distress employment---forced to become a peddler on street pavements for lack of regular paid employment---according to economist and former Chief Statistician of India, Pronob Sen.

India's unemployment woes positively correlate with a decline in the MSME (Micro, Small, Medium Enterprises) sector, touted as the backbone of the economy, bulwark of job generation and export-led growth. Since fiscal year 2020--'21, MSME exports have steadily deteriorated, from 49.4 percent to 43.6 percent in 2022--'23. These reductions are substantial and have translated into widespread unemployment, especially in rural areas where 52 percent of the MSMEs are located.

Global companies that have off-shore manufacturing facilities in China are envisaging a China plus One strategy, as the Chinese labour force concentrated on the coastal hubs has become uncompetitive due to rising wages and income leveling. Also, China, a single-party authoritarian state, has recently embarked on punitive actions against private companies, providing impetus for MNCs to look for alternatives.

As a result of these macroeconomic and socio-political developments, China had to relinquish \$150 billion worth of market share in labour-intensive goods. India was able to capture only 10 percent of that lost value, with the majority going to East Asian countries like Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia and also Bangladesh. With a population of 100 million, Vietnam now exports the equivalent value in US dollars to India, which is 1.4 billion.

India's response to the emerging global opportunity left by China was to launch the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (self-reliant India) scheme, an inward-looking and protectionist framework, allegedly benefitting only a few Indian conglomerates. In hindsight, it is only an iteration of the regressive "License Raj" regime, the erstwhile Indian economic policy, before the liberalisation of 1991.

The Atmanirbhar Scheme is characterised by a three-pronged strategy. Raising tariffs for imported goods, providing subsidies through a Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, and promoting 'national champions' are three vaunted elements of this industrial policy. Since 2014, India has raised tariffs for more than 3200 goods, adversely impacting 70 percent of imports.

India is mainly a re-exporter that relies heavily on imports of intermediate goods, which are further processed to add value to the value chain and subsequently exported. High tariffs have hurt domestic manufacturers of export-oriented goods' global competitiveness. It also serves as a deterrent for FDI flows and dissuades global companies from engaging in Greenfield investments and Brownfield acquisitions in India.

Between 2014 and 2021, more than 2700 MNCs have closed operations in India. Prominent among them are GM, Ford, Harley Davidson, Cairn Energy, Hutchinson, Docomo,

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Lafarge, Carrefour, Henkel, Daiichi Sanyo, Man Truck and Bus, Holcim etc, citing unsustainable policy framework, price wars and declining profitability. License Raj in India has resurged as equally deleterious Resource Raj and Subsidy Raj, denting investor confidence.

The incumbent government is patronising two giant conglomerates, Adani Group and Ambani-led Reliance Industries to create 'national champions' for supporting policy goals. This has precedence in Zaibatsu in Japan and Chaebols of South Korea where governments handpicked business houses to transform them into conglomerates as part of their industrial policies. In Japan and South Korea, such initiatives were meticulously planned and guided under stringent caveats, which were mandatory to design and de-

velop globally competitive products and brands.

But in India, Adani and Ambani are favoured for their deep presence in non-tradable domestic infrastructure sectors, sold within India, insulated from global competition through government regulations in tariffs and subsidies. Though the rollout of broadband, 4G network by Reliance Jio has been a success story, providing millions of Indians access to the internet, the drawbacks of creating national champions far outweigh the intended benefits.

Failure to create a level playing field through detrimental policies, including formalisation and import substitution, would only stifle innovation, efficiency, competition and economic growth. Because of the scope and reach of Adani and Ambani in the economy, they will become too big to fail, which could potentially cause collateral damage.

Make in India's much-touted success story is technology behemoth Apple assembling iPhone in India. iPhone assembly represents the value chain's lowest rung, constituting 4 percent of the cost structure. India is offering 6 percent of the invoice price as a subsidy under the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme, euphemistically bribing a cash-rich tech giant to establish operations in India. Therefore, the associated wages for the cost of assembly are paid by the taxpayers' money.

If Indian manufacturing aspires to move up the value chain, performing advanced manufacturing or sub-assembly operations that are significant revenue generators, there will be intense competition from China, Taiwan, and Vietnam as they still exist. The PLI scheme mainly targets capital-intensive industries that have longer gestation periods from ROI. The need of the hour to ameliorate India's gnawing unem-

ployment crisis is to incentivise the establishment and development of export-oriented, labour-intensive businesses.

Another injudicious move was India opting out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a regional trade agreement between vibrant and dynamic economies in the Asia-Pacific, covering one-third of the global population and 30 percent of the global GDP.

The signatories include China, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, South Korea, Singapore and other ASEAN countries, which would have given a tremendous fillip for Indian manufacturing exports through automatic access to the world's largest market and trading bloc.

Yet, the long-term strategy warrants India's lynchpin role in the global services economy, capitalising on the vast whirlpool of talent, English-speaking managers, and entrepreneurial acumen of digital startups. The service sector currently contributes more than 50 percent of GDP growth at current prices. The global diaspora of Indian managers, adorning stellar roles in the services sector in most developed G7 countries could play a vital role in this Indian renaissance.

The last ten years have witnessed substantial investments in physical infrastructure in roads, ports, highways and railways which are commendable initiatives in improving the base of the economy.

But growth should be prioritised. The Indian manufacturing sector, historically plagued by disabilities in poor infrastructure, exorbitant logistics and transportation costs, a dearth of quality, and high-skilled labour, requires contingency-level planning and redemptive action. The 'Make in India' programme must be synergised with an Invent in India vision. □□□

[Courtesy: Madras Courier]

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'PEN IS MIGHTIER THAN SWORD'

## Red Hammer and One Shyam Sundar Ray

**Abhijit Guha**

**S**HYAM SUNDAR RAY, known to us as our favourite man in Midnapore, was a journalist in the strict sense of the term. I came to know about him from my friend Samir Sanyal, who was a Professor of Physics at Midnapore College in the early nineties. The occasion of my meeting with Shyam Sundar Ray was a dirty incident at Vidyasagar University in which I worked for 30 years from 1985-2016 in the Department of Anthropology. During 1990 a very bright young lecturer at our Department of Library and Information Science was not given extension for his study leave to complete his PhD at the University of Sheffield, UK under a Commonwealth Scholarship. The lecturer Mr Gobinda Gopal Chaudhury, who was doing excellent works at UK and had just asked for an extension of one year to complete his doctoral work and the Commonwealth authorities, had also agreed to extend the scholarship. But Mr Chaudhury's fault was that he was not a supporter of the then CPM-led ruling left front government and the Vidyasagar University executive council decided to dismiss him from his job. Shyam Sundar Ray wrote a scathing report on 2nd July 1992 in *The Statesman* on the dismissal of Chaudhury, which still exists in the archive of the newspaper as a record of how the Red Hammer smashed even the slightest opposition and the way degeneration of the educational institutions engulfed the universities in West Bengal during the left rule. Just after one year another lecturer Mr Sibabrata Das of the Commerce Department of Vidyasagar University

was not given extension beyond two years who got a fellowship by the Government of India to do his PhD on community development at the John Hopkins University, USA. Shyam Sundar Ray did not remain silent and again wrote a factual report in *The Statesman* on 5th September 1993 referencing the case of Mr Gobinda Gopal Chaudhury.

Ray's reportage also had good effects in checking corruption. I know of two glaring incidents. In one incident the exposure of corruption by a left party affiliated non-teaching staff at Vidyasagar University prevented him to apply for faculty position by a series of news items penned by Shyam Sundar Ray during 2004-2006. In the second incident, a former vice-chancellor had to refund the UGC money with interest, which he had misappropriated to fund his conference participation in Beijing in 2004. Here also, Ray's series of reports seemed to have worked.

Shyam Sundar Ray could not be bribed by any authority and he attacked corrupt vice-chancellors, professors, officials, student union leaders and even non-teaching staff of Vidyasagar University on grounds of misappropriation of UGC funds, irregular functions of Departments and the like. But Mr Ray like a true and unbiased journalist also reported the successes and achievements of Vidyasagar University and some of the positive examples set by its vice-chancellors and teachers of the varsity in the various fields of academia like obtaining patents, publishing lectures of world renowned experts and holding workshops and seminars having social relevance. Nothing escaped Shyam Sundar Ray's probing

journalistic eyes. His reports in *The Statesman* provided the mirror for Vidyasagar University.

The above account, however, does not mean that Ray was confined to the affairs of a university through his microscopic lens. His wide ranging journalistic binocular also viewed macro issues like land acquisition for private profit making industries by the government in Midnapore. Ray was probably the first journalist to describe the grabbing of fertile land by the government for the Tatas and Birlas at least a decade before the Singur and Nandigram episodes in the Kharagpur area of the Paschim Medinipur district. Ray neither missed to admit his errors through the publication of a number of corrigenda nor did he forget to follow up issues over the years, a rare quality of a journalist. One glaring example was his series of news items published on the acquisition of fertile agricultural land for two big pig iron manufacturing industries. One may reread his reports in *The Statesman* entitled 'Midnapore farmers resist land survey' (10.01.1996, p.3), 'Neither iron nor rice for Midnapore tribals' (12.03.1998, p.3), 'Kalaikunda land unused' (18.11.1999, p.4) and 'Hungry tribals pay for unfinished dream plant' (05.07.2000).

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Let me now turn to Shyam Sundar Ray's biography without which my account would be incomplete. Shyam Sundar Ray was born in the western part of a rural area of erstwhile Midnapore district on 1st March 1942 and studied at Garbeta High School. He passed B.A. with Honours in Political Science from Asutosh College, Calcutta and then obtained his M.A. in the same subject from the University of Calcutta. He joined *The Statesman* as a correspondent in 1976 and retired from the same house as a staff correspondent in the year 2011. Ray loved *The Statesman* and his profession and never thought to leave

this newspaper. He was not interested in getting a better salaried job elsewhere. He used to live a simple life and made a small house in an almost rural setting on the eastern margins of Midnapore town, never accepted gifts from the rich businessmen and politicians.

Ray married in 1972 and his wife late Mrs Swapna Ray was a graduate and chose to remain a housewife. The couple paid all attention in educating their three daughters before their marriage. Their daughters, Rajyasree, Shilpi and Kasturi were well educated but Kasturi had an untimely death while studying for her graduation at the Raja N.L.Khan

Women's College. Rajyasree completed her PhD from Vidyasagar University and now a lecturer in Zoology at a College in Birbhum and Shilpi is a housewife after the completion of her graduation.

Shyam Sundar Ray who passed away on 10.10.2023 believed that 'pen is mightier than sword' and led a frugal way of living with a love for writing what he used to call 'factual reporting'. Ray's demise left a void in the world of bold and painstaking journalism devoid of hypocrisy and stunts. □□

Abhijit Guha, Former Professor in Anthropology, Vidyasagar University,  
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#### CRIMINAL TRIBES ACT 1871

## Denying Dignity to Anti-British Rebels

*B K Lodhi*

**I**NDIAN 'LOWER CASTES AND communities', particularly those, who fought with arms against the British were treated by the English men as uncivilised and barbarous Tribes.

Rohilla war took place in 1773s, and an independent, peaceful Rohilkhand was taken by the British after a bloody war and brutal massacre of the local agrarian communities. As expected, many tribes and castes fled the country and became nomadic. Many might have become revengeful towards the British. Though some of them revolted with arms against British but could not stand. So they started fighting in guerrilla style in Rohilkhand. Thus, the Regulation Act No. XXII of 1793 was the first step taken by the British when they notified certain tribes of northern India as Criminals. (Mahasweta Devi, 1998)

After the Rohilla Revolt of Rohilkhand, Bundelkhand Revolt took place in 1842. This is also known as 'Bundela Vidroh', in which Lodhis,

Gonds and Bundela played a vital role. It was spread in the entire central India i.e. the then united provinces of India. Since the rebellions could not be controlled by the army of the Company, the Governor General of Bundelkhand, Mr T H Medak, Political Agent as well as the Company Secretary announced that 'those communities, who will abandon the Criminal tendency, the Governor General had promised to pardon them'. But Lodhis and Gonds continued their fighting, consequently, they were reckoned as habitual criminals in 1842 itself. (Rakesh Ratan Pal Singh, Bundelkhand Vidroh, and Mishra Jai Prakash, Bundela Rebellions-Mutiny, 1857)

There is historical evidence that a number of communities in the northern India were involved in rebellion against the British in 1857. These communities were used by the rebel princes and rajahs either directly to fight against the British, or were indirectly involved in a variety of ways in assisting their armies.

As a result, these communities were brutally suppressed during 1857, and later declared Criminal Tribes under the Criminal Tribes ACT, 1871 (Ref. Renke commission).

After the failure of Mutiny of 1857, British Government passed Government of India Act, 1858 just after the revolution and thereby the entire administration of East India Company was taken over by the British Crown and appointed a secretary who was controlling and regulating the whole Country on the direction of the British Crown. The main reasons for enacting 1871 Act was revolt by the Tribal Communities against the British Empire.

#### **Series of Criminal Tribes Act**

- In 1871, CTA, 1871 was enforced in North India.
- In 1876, CTA, 1871 was enforced in Bengal Presidency.
- In 1911, CTA, 1911 was enforced in Madras Presidency.
- In 1924, CTA, 1924 was enforced in entire India.

Census of British India started in the year 1881, with main aim to identify the criminal tribes. As per census of British India, 1931 conducted for United Provinces (i.e. Northern India), the following Tribes were iden-



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tified as Criminal Tribes: 1-Aheria\* 2-Badak\* (Badhik) 3-Bahelia\* (Pasia) 4-Banjara 5-Bamyar\* 6-Beria\* 7-Bhar\* 8-Bhawapuria 9-Bauria\* 10-Chamar 11-Dom\*12-Gandhila 13-Ghosi (Hindu) 14-Gujar 15-Habura\* 16-Kevat 17-Khatik\* 18-Kisan 19-Lodh 20-Mallah 21-Meo, Mevati, Mina or Mina Meo 22-Musahar\* 23-Nat\* 24-Ondhia 25-Palwar Dusadh\*26-Pasi\* 27-Rajput Muslim 28-Ranghar 29-Rind 30-Sawaurhiya\* 31-Sansia\* 32-Taga Bhat.

[Note-Those with an asterisk are also included under the untouchable and depressed classes. All can safely be regarded as backward classes.]

### **Repeal of the CT Act, 1924 in 1952**

The CTA, 1924 was repealed by the Criminal Tribes Laws (Repeal) Act, 1952 on the recommendations of Criminal Enquiry Committee, headed by Shri Ananthasaynam Ayyangar. As a result, the tribes notified earlier as Criminal Tribes, stood Denotified, and the name 'Denotified Tribes or Vimukt Jati' is being used for them since then.

Even today so-called civilised society treats them as criminals. Stigma of criminality still remains till date; as a result, they are deprived of the human dignity and minimum basic rights. □□□

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—Fr

100 YEARS LATER

## **Lenin Is Still Not Dead**

**Harsh Thakor**

**A** HUNDRED YEARS AFTER his death, Lenin or Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov still holds the mantle of the proletariat and the oppressed peoples of the world. Lenin's legacy still shimmers like an inextinguishable lamp. Communists across the world observed the centenary of his death anniversary on January 21.

No character as much influenced the course of the 20th Century as Lenin, who defined a new epoch and constructed the first ever workers state.

It was the sheer genius of Lenin to crystallise the theory of Marx in a concrete form to give birth or shape to the first workers state.

Lenin devoted his whole life to the Russian proletariat and the oppressed people of various nations and nationalities, with no drop of personal interest.

Even bourgeois historians glorified Lenin's role and described him as a highly humane figure. They are rediscovering Lenin's role in shaping western welfare states.

The revolutionary activity of the Bolsheviks crystallised triumph of the proletariat with the Great October Socialist Revolution and planted the seeds for the building of Socialism for the first time in history.

Lenin left no stone unturned in giving a blow to every revisionist or reformist bending of the revolutionary theory. He evaluated the fight against opportunism as an imperative task for the victory of the socialist revolution and, on the same time, refuted the so-called pseudo-revolutionary rhetoric. Lenin was in essence democratic, in complete contrast to what the social media projected him. He elevated proletarian democracy to its highest form, through crystallising the soviets or councils of workers delegates, which constituted new organs of workers rule.

The counter-revolutionary toppling of regimes in the Soviet Union and the socialist countries in Eastern Europe in 1989-1991 paved the way for various imperialists and apologists of the bourgeoisie to launch a

tirade against Lenin and to degrade Socialism-Communism.

The contribution of Lenin in preserving or sharpening the world revolution is an epic in itself. It encompasses his combat against the chain of world enemies; to construct the new order in Russia. Lenin unflinchingly consolidated the Soviet government and the Communist International.

In Lenin's last phase, Lenin's most innovative decisions were in the Brest-Litovsk treaty, showing tactical mastery: introducing New Economic policy, where in spite of allowing for private plots he retained a workers state: and the completion of the Communist International in 1920. His major achievement was giving a mortal blow to conspiracies of imperialism by invigorating the mass resistance of not only the Red Army and the Industrial Workers, but also of the peasantry in regions the white guards overran.

Lenin elevated the science of Marxism to the stage of Leninism. Leninism sprouted amidst in war and tested in practice, which represented the theory and tactics of the proletarian revolution in general and the theory and tactics of the dictatorship of the proletariat in particular.

Lenin demonstrated that imperialism was identified by the ascendancy of monopoly capital, in contrast to smaller units of capital. Monopoly capital did not merely mean domination by one single unit of capital over another industry, but domination of few powerful units over the whole branches of economy. Monopoly capital developed into an imperialist stage.

Lenin summarised that the dic-

tatorship of the proletariat was only a transitional form and on completing its task; the state machine of coercion extinguishes and is replaced by a Communist Society.

Today even in digital age, with advent of globalisation, Leninism is as applicable as 100 years ago. The world is experiencing an economic crisis and penetration of imperialism, at magnitude unscaled.

Leninism remains the political

base to nail the tide of counter revolutionary trends.

Leninism is still the principle Marxism of today or principal link between Marx and Mao, being the era of 'imperialism and proletarian Revolution' as defined by Lenin.

Possibly had Lenin lived longer, he may have rectified inherent defects within the Soviets and party, to create the egalitarian society visualised by Marx, inviting greater dissent. □□□

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## BALOCH LIBERATION MOVEMENT

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### Women At War

*Abdul Basit*

**I**N APRIL 2022, WHEN SHARI Baloch, a 30-year-old mother of two, targeted Karachi University's Confucius Centre in a suicide bombing, killing four people, including three Chinese instructors, it sent shockwaves across Pakistan and prompted the surviving Chinese staff to leave the country. The attack marked an apparent shift in Baloch insurgents' recruitment patterns and violent tactics. In the two decades of the current liberation struggle for Balochistan's independence, never before had a woman undertaken such an attack. Moreover, when it came to be known that she belonged to an educated middle-class family, held a master's degree in education and taught at a public school in Balochistan, it surprised people further.

A year later, in June 2023, a second attack took place. Sumaiya Qalandrani Baloch, another woman suicide bomber, targeted a convoy of the Pakistani military in Balochistan's Turbat district. The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), one of the main groups of the Baloch insurgency, declared that the "era of women's active participation in the armed struggle has begun." Prior to the attack, Sumaiya, 25, was work-

ing for Hakkal, the BLA's media wing, while pursuing a bachelor's degree in computer science.

These attacks prompted seasoned observers of the Baloch conflict to look more deeply into women's evolving participation in the insurgency, and compelled the Pakistani state to come to grips with Balochistan's changing reality. While the attacks generated simultaneous shock and curiosity among the public, they also allowed the Baloch insurgents to draw attention to their demands and their goal of a separate Baloch homeland.

Balochistan, Pakistan's southwestern province, has been in the throes of this insurgency for the last two decades, but its genesis lies in the Baloch community's long-standing political disenfranchisement and socioeconomic grievances revolving around ownership of its rich resources, including coal, chromite, sulfur, limestone and iron ore, as well as gold, copper and titanium. Since 1947, Pakistan has benefited from Balochistan's rich resources but has left the province at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, leaving many in the Baloch community feeling alienated from the state.

Despite being strategically located

at the confluence of South and Central Asia, Balochistan is Pakistan's most impoverished province. The majority of the country's poorest and least developed districts are in this province and, according to research by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics in May 2020, nearly 41% of households in Balochistan live below the poverty line. In recent years, the beginning of work on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has added to locals' fears that they will be further deprived of their resources and will continue to lag behind.

Hence several insurgent groups, such as the BLA, the Balochistan Liberation Front, the Baloch Republican Army and the Baloch Republican Guard, among others, have been waging a campaign which has evolved from a low-intensity conflict to a sophisticated insurgency. Apart from hitting government infrastructure like power pylons, gas pipelines and railway tracks, and tougher targets like security installations and well-guarded CPEC projects, they have also expanded the scope of attacks from Balochistan to Karachi, the capital of neighboring Sindh province and the financial and cultural hub of the country.

The current, 21st-century wave of Baloch insurgency is said to be the fifth, and is considered to be larger and more lethal than the previous four, which took place from

1948 up to the 1970s. Unlike the earlier waves, which revolved around demands for political autonomy, equitable resource-sharing and proportional representation for the Baloch in Pakistan's mainstream politics, the current wave espouses separatism and does not believe in a negotiated resolution to the conflict.

Known for its leftist and secular leanings, the Baloch insurgency had not been associated with extreme violence like suicide bombings until 2018. That was when the BLA established the Majeed Brigade, its suicide squad, and started hitting high-profile targets like the Chinese Consulate in Karachi, the Pearl Continental Hotel in Gwadar, the Pakistan Stock Exchange and the headquarters of Frontier Corps, a paramilitary force, in Balochistan's Nushki district. In fact, Sumaiya's fiancé, Rehan Baloch, the son of Aslam Baloch, who founded the brigade, became the movement's first male suicide bomber when he targeted a bus of Chinese engineers working on the CPEC in Dalbadin district in 2018.

Since then, Baloch militants have perpetrated around 10 suicide attacks, including so-called fedayeen ("self-sacrificers") operations, in which activists participate with the intention of not coming out alive. The brigade also follows an open recruitment policy under which insurgents from any group can volunteer for self-sacrificing missions, whether they are looking for revenge

or recognition, or want to provoke a reaction from the counterinsurgent forces.

Although only two cases have been reported, the BLA has claimed that a sizable number of women have volunteered for self-sacrificing operations. Until the two suicide bombings took place, Baloch women's participation in the insurgency had been largely peaceful, and they lent their support mostly in their capacity as mothers, sisters and wives who had lost their loved ones due to enforced disappearances or extrajudicial killings. Around 5,000 people have been declared missing in Balochistan, according to Voice for Baloch Missing Persons, which includes dissidents and those branded as supporters and sympathisers of insurgents. In the majority of cases, families do not know their whereabouts or the charges against them. Since most of them are men and the sole earners in their families, women end up facing the brunt of the repercussions.

Recently, many women activists have also become officeholders in activist organisations, working to highlight grievances of the Baloch and the issues of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial arrests and killings of dissidents.

Leaders like Aslam Baloch's wife Yasmeen also encouraged women to join the movement. In a 2019 interview, Yasmeen said that the social barriers that existed in a patriarchal

society like Balochistan, where women have struggled to play an active role in the movement, were shifting and that there was now a realisation that self-determination could not be attained without women's participation.

While Baloch separatist groups can gain strategic and tactical advantages from women's participation, since they are less likely to be suspected as suicide bombers, particularly in traditional religious societies like Pakistan, this could add to the challenges of women political workers and human rights activists in Balochistan. While security agencies have mainly arrested men, a dynamic that could be altered after the two women's suicide bombings, Baloch women activists fear that they could also be picked up extrajudicially on the pretext of security concerns.

Amid worsening conflict in Balochistan, the participation of women suicide bombers points to a potential new and more violent phase of the insurgency. Irrespective of whether more women join the movement or not in the future, their evolving roles in the face of the state's apathy and the shrinking space for peaceful activism will help insurgent groups make deeper inroads into Baloch society and gain wider acceptance and legitimacy. □□

*(Source: New Lines Magazine)*

*[Abdul Basit is a research fellow at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore]*

## A LIFELONG NIGHTMARE

# More than 50 Million Cases are Pending

**Sameer Yasir**

**W**HEN THE ARMED MEN stormed into the village of 'lower-caste people', fanning out through its dirt lanes and flinging open the doors of its mud homes, Binod Paswan jumped into

a grain silo and peered out in horror.

Within hours, witnesses say, upper-caste landlords massacred 58 Dalits, people once known as "untouchables," most of them farm workers in the eastern state of Bihar

who had been agitating for higher wages. Seven of them were members of Mr Paswan's family.

The next day, he lodged a police complaint, and investigators soon filed charges. That was 26 years ago. He is still waiting—after conflicting verdicts and hundreds of court hearings, with some witnesses now dead or impaired by fading eyesight—for a resolution.

“A cry for justice turned into a lifelong nightmare for us,” said Mr Paswan, 45.

In a vast nation with no shortage of intractable problems, it is one of the longest-running and most far-reaching: India’s staggeringly overburdened judicial system.

The country’s economy is growing rapidly, technology is reshaping more than a billion lives and national leaders are striving for global power, but India seems to have few answers for the ever-deepening court backlogs that deprive citizens of their rights and hamper business activity.

More than 50 million cases are pending across the country, according to the National Judicial Data Grid—a pileup that has doubled over the past two decades. At the current pace, it would take more than 300 years to clear India’s docket.

There are many reasons for the backlogs. India has one of the world’s lowest ratios of judges to population, with just 21 per million people, compared with about 150 in the United States. For decades, India’s leaders and courts have set a target of 50 judges per million people. But there have been no sizable funding increases to hire more judges, improve court facilities and digitise procedures, as officials deem other priorities more important.

A rigid system with archaic rules inherited from the British also slows the process. Lawyers make endless oral arguments and produce lengthy written submissions. Little has

changed even as government committees have recommended an end to the writing of testimonies by hand and to time-consuming procedures in examining witnesses.

Delays are endemic in both criminal and civil cases. About 77 percent of prisoners in India are awaiting trial, compared with one in three worldwide. Of the more than 11 million pending civil cases, most of which involve disputes over land or other property, nearly a quarter are at least five years old.

The country’s longest-running legal dispute—a bank liquidation case—was settled last January after 72 years. In June, a 90-year-old man was given life in prison for his involvement in a 42-year-old case.

“What are we doing about resolving the issue? Frankly, nothing,” Madan Lokur, a former Supreme Court judge, said in a recent interview.

“How long will it take to get a decision in your case?” he added. “If you’re fortunate, maybe in your lifetime.”

Judges churn through scores of cases every day, many of them nuisance filings by the government or citizens. Quick hearings lead to adjournments—and the backlog grows.

The Government of India would seem to have a direct interest in easing the delays: It is the country’s biggest litigant, accounting for nearly 50 percent of pending cases.

But successive administrations have used the courts’ vulnerability as a political weapon. Fights between the judiciary and the executive branch over judicial appointments have reached new heights under the country’s current Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, who critics say has largely cowed the courts as he consolidates power across India’s institutions.

The Supreme Court remains a last resort for justice, but its judges are often bogged down by less-con-

sequential matters like marriage or property disputes. When they do rule, the judges are increasingly seen as favouring the government, which has showered retirement perks on jurists who appear to toe the line, experts say.

And while opposition politicians and activists accused of crimes often languish for years in legal limbo, government supporters facing the same have an easier time getting bail.

The glacial pace of India’s judiciary was evident one recent morning in Mathura, a town in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh.

Hundreds of plaintiffs and defendants wandered aimlessly through the court complex’s crowded corridors, while lawyers holding papers under their arms took sips of hot milk and ginger tea.

In one corner, a lawyer and police officers joked with a milkman who had been accused more than a decade ago of selling adulterated products. The inspector who filed the case never appeared in court and was transferred from the town. The milkman, Mahender, who uses one name, has appeared at dozens of hearings anyway. The judge calls his name, the accused raises his hand, the inspector and a witness are absent, and another court date is assigned.

Even lawyers who become plaintiffs can struggle to navigate the system.

In 1999, an Indian Railways ticketing officer overcharged Tungnath Chaturvedi, a lawyer at the Mathura court, by 25 cents. Mr Chaturvedi, 67, said he filed a case not because of the money, but because of the agent’s attitude.

Tungnath Chaturvedi, seated, filed a case in 1999 against Indian Railways after he was overcharged 25 cents for a ticket. Mr Chaturvedi said he filed the suit because of the railroad agent’s attitude.

For **Frontier Contact**

**ALAIGAL  
VELIYEETAGAM**

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It took him 120 hearings over 23 years to get a verdict. Last year, a consumer court ordered the railway to pay a fine of about \$188, as well as the outstanding amount of 25 cents, plus 12 percent interest. Still, Indian Railways went to the highest court in Uttar Pradesh, and it reduced the fine to \$80.

“When I filed the case, I used to go up and down the five stories of the court every day to attend court hearings,” Mr Chaturvedi said. “When the judge delivered the verdict in my case, I was not able to walk from my home to the court because of arthritis. And I had already retired from work. That is the story of the Indian judiciary.”

Many cases are far more serious than a small overcharge, and the toll on those waiting for justice is much greater.

In June 1997, Neelam Krishnamoorthy lost her two children, ages 17 and 13, in a fire at a New Delhi movie theatre that killed 59 people.

Her struggle to get justice in-

spired a Netflix series and countless newspaper articles. Her activism led to improved fire safety measures in shopping malls and theaters.

Ten years after the fire, 16 men, including the cinema’s owners and staff members and safety inspectors, were found guilty of negligence. Four of the men were already dead.

The two brothers who owned the theatre, both powerful real estate barons, were given two years in prison, a sentence that Ms Krishnamoorthy appealed to the Supreme Court. It did not rule until 2015, waiving the sentence and instead fining the brothers; Ms Krishnamoorthy appealed again.

“Had I known it would take more than two decades to even get bare minimum justice, I don’t think I would have gone to court,” Ms Krishnamoorthy said.

She continues to make the court rounds, now accusing the brothers of tampering with evidence.

Justice has also been elusive for the victims of the 1997 village mas-

sacre in Bihar. In 2010, a court found 26 people guilty, giving 16 of them death sentences and the others life imprisonment. The men challenged the verdict in a higher court, and two years later, citing a lack of evidence, it acquitted all 26 defendants.

Mr Paswan and a few other eye-witnesses filed an appeal at the Supreme Court in 2014. The case has come before the judges nine times, but Mr Paswan has no idea what is going on.

Days after the massacre, Dalit leaders erected a red brick memorial just outside his home. The names and ages of the 58 people who died are inscribed in Hindi. Twenty-seven women—eight of them pregnant—and 16 children were among the dead.

“When I look at this memorial, I can hear cries of people for help,” Mr Paswan said. “It also serves as a constant reminder of injustice done to lower-caste people by the courts of this country.” □□□

[Source: NYT]

## LETTERS

### **Graham Steins and his children**

*The life of the dead is placed in the memory of the living.*

—Marcus Tullius Cicero

*Politics is nothing but theology in action*

—Ambedkar

Right-wing politics suffers from a common syndrome everywhere.

It never feels confident to project its own icons for the rest of the humanity, whatever might be their claims about their worldview, it knows that its own icons are detested by a wide spectrum of people.

The easiest way it finds to overcome this lacunae is to appropriate already established icons—who were even opposed to their world view as well and claim them their own. In

fact, it does not have any qualms in utilising dates—bearing special significance for exploited and oppressed and marginalised of the world—to put their stamp on it.

The project of Hindutva Supremacism—which yearns / strives to transform a Secular, Socialist, Democratic and Sovereign Republic into a Hindu Rashtra has perhaps achieved near perfection in this kind of politics.

### **Subhash Gatade, New Socialist Initiative Karpoori Thakur**

The forthcoming parliamentary poll is the issue. And OBC factor matters, particularly in northern India. So all parties are busy to woo OBC voters by way of honouring some OBC leaders and raising hue and

cry every now and then about reservation. The Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP] has started taking the name of Karpoori Thakur to claim the votes of the OBC people. Union Home Minister Amit Shah on January 23 made a grand statement regarding Bharat Ratna award to former Bihar Chief Minister Karpoori Thakur by the central government. Karpoori Thakur is considered to be the pioneer of OBC politics in Bihar. Amit Shah said that the decision to honour Karpoori Thakur with Bharat Ratna is an honour to millions of poor people from backward and Dalit communities by the central government. He highlighted the strong efforts of the Modi government for the development of OBCs.

While celebrating the birth centenary of former Bihar Chief Minister Karpoori Thakur, known as a public

leader, the Home Minister said that the Central Government has revised the list of OBCs. States have been given the right to prepare their own list of OBCs. Reservation was provided to OBCs in IIMs and IITs. This was also the decision they made when allocating gas stations.

He said that the Prime Minister himself hails from a backward community. By conferring Bharat Ratna on Karpooori Thakur, 'he has given respect and justice to many poor, youth who work honestly and selflessly for the society and those who lead the politics of honesty'.

**Muhammad, Bihar**

## **Swami**

### **Ananda Theerthan**

Swami Ananda Theerthan, a crusader against all forms of discrimination, especially caste, waged his wars in his birth land of Kerala and nearby regions in south India. He was assaulted time and again for his forays with Dalits into spaces forbidden for the lowered castes, like schools and temples. Hardly any of it is recorded, except in the memories of those he fought for. The documentary on this little known reformer, Swami Ananda Theerthan: Nishedhiyude Aatmashakti, made by Bindu Sajan and Abhijith Narayanan, was a revelation to its viewers, during its premiere at Bharat

Bhavan in Thiruvananthapuram on Sunday, January 21.

There is a campus named after him in the Kannur University, and there are a few scattered academic papers on him. Yet, an internet search would throw up only a few pages. Bindu and Abhijith, with the help of their creative consultant Sajan Gopalan, were able to unearth a lot more.

The documentary also records his stint in Tamil Nadu, where he followed similar methods to fight caste. He led Dalits to use the water of a pond in Madurai, forbidden for the lowered castes in the 50s, and got beaten up for it, on the orders of the village officer.

A joke about the saffron robes of Ananda Theerthan is that Sree Narayana Guru made him wear it so that he would get fewer beatings since someone in an ascetic's clothes tends to be attacked less. Yet, his reform works in Kerala put him at the receiving end of several brutal attacks. Swami Ananda Theerthan passed away in November 1987.

**Cris & Maria Teresa Raju,  
Kerala**

### **Politicisation of Ram**

Ayodhya is now not just home to yet another temple in the name of Ram, it epitomises the ongoing reshaping of India on the basis of a growing fusion of state power, Hinduism and corporate interests. India's most prominent corporate faces were present in the event along with the entire BJP-RSS leadership and individuals in top constitutional positions. The Prime Minister who earlier used to describe himself as 'prime servant' of the people now routinely calls himself God's chosen representative even as his bhakts have started projecting him as an incarnation or avatar of God. The idea of modern India as a secular democratic republic is fast being obliterated with the

republic virtually metamorphosing into a corporate-backed monarchy packaged as a divinely ordained order.

The construction of Ram Path has reportedly entailed the destruction of a whopping 2,200 shops, 800 houses, 30 temples, 9 mosques and 6 tombs. The drive for developing Ayodhya as a world-class tourist destination has also meant the arrival of the Adani group, the rise of a lucrative land market at the cost of local farmers and farming, and environmentally hazardous construction in the eco-sensitive zone on the bank of river Saryu.

The coalescence of religion, state power and big business is also taking religion away from the private domain of individuals into the vortex of big business and big spectacle. The corridors being built in Varanasi, Mathura and now Ayodhya have led to extensive demolition of old buildings, shops and even small temples. Like corporate takeover of small farming and small trade, a similar phenomenon of centralisation and concentration is being witnessed in the arena of religion too. And the politicisation of Ram, especially in the context of the impending Lok Sabha elections, has even blurred the distinction between a Ram Mandir and a Modi monument. Huge cutouts of Modi in Ayodhya have overshadowed even Ram. Promotion of the personality cult of the supreme leader is exploiting many common people's devotion to Ram to the hilt.

**Dipankar Bhattacharya,  
General Secretary,  
Communist Party of India  
(Marxist-Leninist) Liberation**

### **In the Name of Ram**

Ram temple exists at Ayodhya because the house of worship of another religious community was razed by a mob of militant Hindus.

Those who condone this sav-

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agery as belated reversal of the destruction in the 16th century of a Hindu liturgical structure by Mir Baqi—who raised the Babri mosque on its site as a tribute to Babur—are perhaps too benighted to appreciate that they are applauding the very barbarism they decry in the Mughals.

The inauguration of the temple to Ram in Ayodhya is not a religious event to which politicians have been invited out of courtesy; it is the culmination of the most consequential political agitation to remake India into a Hindu state to which politicians of all persuasions are being summoned to perform a legitimating.

**Komireddi Kapil**

## **Chemical Weapon Attack**

Last Friday [January 19], students and community members at Columbia University gathered in protest of the ongoing genocide in Gaza. They were met with a chemical weapon attack.

Two individuals sprayed the students with what is believed to be “skunk,” an illegal military-grade weapon developed by the Israeli army for use against Palestinians.

Eight students were hospitalised, and dozens more needed medical attention.

These attacks were made possible by Columbia University administration that has consistently fostered a climate of anti-Palestinian racism on campus.

These attacks were at the same school whose administration censored and suspended its Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) and JVP chapters last semester, citing an imaginary possibility of violence.

But in response to this actual chemical attack and resulting hospitalizations, Columbia first remained silent.

When the school did respond, its initial reaction was not to investigate

this illegal attack on its students, but to “scold” student protestors for holding an “unsanctioned” rally. After community and national outcry, the school has finally agreed to investigate the attack — still without naming the anti-Palestinian context.

We must act now to tell the Columbia administration that this is unacceptable.

In solidarity,

**Jason Farbman, Digital Director  
Jewish Voice for Peace, USA  
Industrial Accidents  
are on the Rise**

In India, industrial accidents kill and disable thousands of people every year. Government data shows that on average, three workers die each day in Indian factories due to a lack of basic safety measures. In 2021, the Labour Ministry informed Parliament that at least 6,500 employees had died while working at factories, ports, mines and construction sites in the preceding five years. Labour activists and trade unions say that the figure could be higher as many incidents are not reported.

In addition to fire safety violations, inadequate training is also a primary cause of accidents at workplaces across the country.

The Safe In India Foundation, an organisation focusing on automotive industry worker safety, stated in its annual report “Crushed 2022,” that every year thousands of workers lose their hands and fingers to accidents in this sector.

Many workers in automotive manufacturing are migrants who are overworked, underpaid, and not adequately trained. Large number of workers recycling India’s e-waste are underpaid and totally unprotected.

India is aiming to become a global industrial hub, encouraging investment and innovation with initiatives such as Startup India. How-

ever, with incidents like the Mundka fire in which 27 people died in New Delhi in 2022 still commonplace, it remains to be seen whether the country’s health and safety standards can keep up. The Mundka was reportedly operating without the permission of the Fire Department due to a number of safety rules violations.

The Indian government has made moves to reform its health and safety codes, but some activists think this has left workers at greater risk. India introduced the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code 2020. Included in the code was a change in the requirement for a “safety committee” in hazardous factories.

Previously, it was mandatory for all companies to form a safety committee, irrespective of the number of workers. However, under the new code, the safety committee is to be formed only after a government order or notification. The government also changed the protocols for workplace inspections, in a bid to simplify the process for companies. In truth Modi’s new labour codes are out and out anti-labour. In the name of development and growth companies can do whatever they like.

“Random and unplanned inspections have stopped almost completely. Now people see no inspections taking place”. The new laws put the compliance bar even lower. Currently, labour officers are responsible for inspecting and ensuring the implementation of safety rules, but this will be discontinued under the new codes.

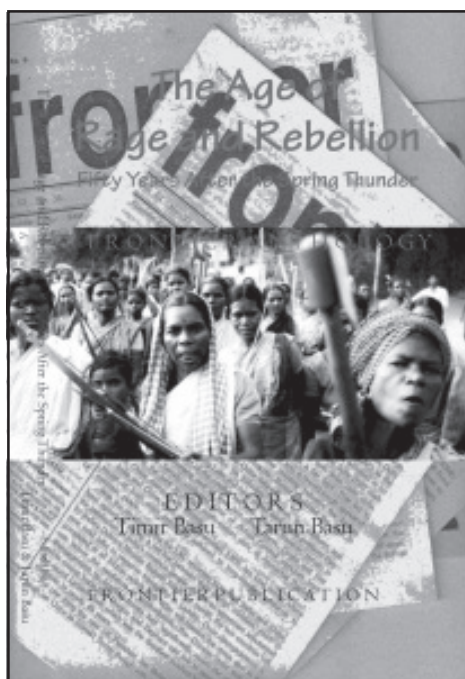
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