

# frontier

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On Other Pages

Comment	2
Note	3
THE UCC DEBATE Muslim Women's Quest for Gender-Just Laws Sabah Khan	4
LEARNING FROM AZAD The Dilemma of Liberal Muslims Moin Qazi	6
BOOKS IN BRIEF Facets of Poverty in America I Satya Sundaram	8
PACKIYANATHAN AHILAN A Sleepless Poet Asok Chattopadhyay	10
VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS Authoritarianism in Action Notan Kar	11
REMEMBERING ANAND From Bellampalli to Dandakaranya V Subrahmanyam	12
Letters	15

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## *Fascism, Bengal Style*

THE DIVERSE WAYS THAT FASCIST TENDENCIES ARE TAKING hold across the country barely obscures their common motivations and direction. Bengal is a classic example though not yet as ripe as Yogi Adityanath's Uttar Pradesh. Poll-related violence in Bengal is endemic. It's now part of this state's political culture. It all started in 1972 during the Congress regime. The art of terrorising the opponents was perfected by the CPM-led left throughout their 34-year rule-or misrule. It doesn't matter whether the ruling party is left or right. The voice of dissent is being crushed with iron hands. They talk of democracy day in and day out but what they practise is autocracy—pure and simple. Within a span of 35 days, including the polling and counting days, after the announcement of 3-tier rural polls in Bengal, 45 people lost their lives. Most of them were party workers and supporters owning allegiance to both ruling and opposition parties—Trinamul Congress, Bharatiya Janata Party, Congress and CPM.

Criminalisation of politics is so pervasive in Bengal that it seems next to impossible to conduct free and fair elections at any level. While the State Election Commission virtually obeys the dictates from the ruling party, the state police establishment has the dubious distinction of behaving in partisan way. They don't take even FIRs from opposition parties. Governor C V Ananda Bose blamed it on the Election Commissioner for his inaction to contain violence and stop blood-bath in pre-poll phase. Ironically the Governor appointed him a few weeks before the poll but this gentleman disappointed the people of Bengal miserably. The Commission would have to take the onus for its abject failure to reign in recurring violence. Citing gruesome incidents of Bhangar, Purulia, Cooch-Behar and Basanti Governor Bose threw a poser at the Commissioner 'Who is to be blamed for those killings? The Commission has to answer'. No, the Commission is not answering. Children are crying, widows are crying. It's the general scenario before every poll. All political parties use MMG—man, money and gun—to terrorise their rivals and in cross-fire many innocent people die. These days election in Bengal means festival of blood.

In a state where unemployment is sky-rocketing a large number of young men of working age group are being forced to become storm troopers of different political parties. Crude bomb-making has become a cottage industry across the state over the years. During vote season they get employment. Panchayat has power to disburse money and so the rat race to win seats leading to bloodshed.

In a situation where old industrial establishments are closing down while new ones are not coming up election is the only industry that employs some people at least periodically. Then panchayat functionaries are allowed to siphon funds otherwise reserved for rural development purposes. So violence is inevitable. Deindustrialisation of Bengal has been going on since the days of Nehru because of a deliberate anti-state discriminatory policy of the Centre. One may revisit Ranjit Roy's "Agony of West Bengal". That tradition continues unabated.

The scheme of decentralisation of power through panchayat and empowerment of people at the grassroots has failed. Corruption has

been institutionalised through panchayat to such an extent that election is more like a ritualistic farce. No election really reflects the actual opinion of voters. Sometimes anti-incumbency factor works but many times it doesn't. Despite huge allegations of corruption against the ruling Trinamul Congress their landslide victory in Bengal's Panchayat polls, virtually marginalising the Bharatiya Janata Party, Congress and CPM, illustrates among other things that the opposition parties are totally isolated from masses. They become active, rather super-active during elections.

In view of the continuing terror, murder, arson and killings before the panchayat polls one judge of Kolkata

High Court opined in favour of stopping election altogether. But no party was interested in it. Attacks on voters escalate because the mute 'spectators' are trying to assert through adult franchise guaranteed under the constitution. This attack has been central to the dismantling of democratic institutions and gestation of fascist currents. As most parties are dictatorial in nature people's independent initiatives are needed to save democracy. More and more people should come forward to defy terror and demand justice. Even in the recently-held bloody panchayat election sporadic resistance here and there against malpractice in voting produced reassuring results. □□□

12-06-2023

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## COMMENT

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### The Coup Is Over

**Y**EVGENY PRIGOZHIN, THE brutal convicted criminal who leads the Wagner mercenary group, declared war on the Russian Ministry of Defence and marched into the city of Rostov-on-Don. He then headed north for Moscow, carrying his demand for the ousting of Minister of Defence Sergei Shoigu and Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov. The city went on alert.

Prigozhin and his men came within 125 miles of the capital Moscow. He then said that a deal had been struck and that Wagner's forces were turning around to avoid bloodshed. Apparently, however, the blood Prigozhin saved from being shed was his own. Prigozhin has in the space of a day gone from being a powerful warlord to a man living on borrowed time in a foreign country, waiting for Russian President Vladimir Putin's inevitable retribution.

According to Peskov, Russia is dropping all charges against Prigozhin, who must now go into

exile in Belarus. Wagner fighters who did not take part in the rebellion will be given amnesty, and then they will sign contracts that will bring them under the control of Shoigu's Ministry of Defence. In truth Shoigu's attempt to seize Wagner's men and dissolve the force might be one of the reasons Prigozhin went on the march. This outcome is a defeat of the first order for Prigozhin, who has now lost everything except his life.

One can at this point only speculate about why Prigozhin undertook this putsch, and why it all failed so quickly. One possibility is that Prigozhin had allies in Moscow who promised to support him, and somehow that support fell through: Perhaps his friends in the Kremlin got cold feet, or were less numerous than Prigozhin realised, or never existed.

Nonetheless, this bizarre episode is not a win for Putin. The Russian President has been visibly wounded, and he will now bear the permanent

scar of political vulnerability. Instead of looking like a decisive statesman, Putin left Moscow after issuing a short video in which he was visibly angry.

Bringing in President Aleksandr Lukashenko as a broker at first seemed an odd choice on Putin's part, but it makes a bit more sense in light of the supposed deal. The Belarusian ruler could personally vouch for Prigozhin's safe passage; Lukashenko has no connections in Moscow that are more important than Putin; he does not live or work in the Kremlin and so he was a secure choice to carry out Putin's terms; he owes Putin his continued rule and has no reason to betray him. Also, sending in Lukashenko was something of a power move: Putin is a former intelligence officer, and in that world, Prigozhin is merely a scummy convict.

Prigozhin gets to stay alive, at least for the moment, but his life as he knew it (and maybe in any sense) is over. Putin, however, is now politically weaker than ever. He is no longer unchallengeable and invincible. Prigozhin's rebellion and its

effects will last beyond today, but how long he will live in Belarus—or stay alive in Belarus—to see how the rest of it plays out is unclear. The coup is over but what is not over is Putin's trouble.

Meanwhile, the Russia-Ukraine war has crossed the 500-day mark, a grim milestone for a conflict that

rages without end in sight. While the fighting has fallen largely into a stalemate---there has been no significant movement in battle lines control in months---the war continues to take a heavy toll on the lives and livelihoods of lakhs of people. The stakes are only getting higher.

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**NOTE**


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## Telangana—A Police State

*CASR writes:*

**T**HE DRACONIAN UNLAWFUL Activities (Prevention) Act [UAPA] has once again been invoked, this time in Tadwai, Telangana against an astonishing number of 152 activists and intellectuals, which includes retired Prof G Haragopal, Prof Gaddam Laxman and Prof Padmaja Shaw. What is more ridiculous and serious at the same time is that Late Justice H Suresh also finds mention in the accused list. The FIR has come to light only after People's Democratic Movement president Chandramouli applied for bail and FIRs filed against him were retrieved by the police where the names of the 152 activists mentioned above were also included. The state has consistently attacked all democratic and dissenting voices by labelling them as Maoist forces and this pattern of mass incarceration of political and civil activists and intellectuals continues, where these 152 individuals are once again made out to be Maoists. This attack on democratic forces must be seen as yet another example of framing people as "Urban Maoists", something that is mongered by Prime Minister, Home Ministers, National Security Advisers and propagated by corporate media. Prof G Haragopal, a retired Dean of School of Social Sciences at University of Hyderabad, has been an active par-

ticipant in Telangana's movement for separate statehood and has questioned the oppressive nature of the Indian state in various instances as an activist for civil liberties. He also played a key role as an interlocutor between the Indian government and Maoists in Odisha.

The ridiculousness of the state's attempt at using draconian laws like UAPA and institutions for its fascist agenda are exposed by the loopholes in their version of events, as Prof G Haragopal points out. He elaborates that the FIR states that the police stumbled upon a meeting of supposed Maoists in 2022 and recovered diary from the meeting which contains the names of all the 152 accused. Among those charged, the name of Justice Hosbet Suresh is also mentioned, who passed away in 2020, two years prior to this event! He also pointed out that Prof Padmaja Shaw, a professor of journalism at Osmania University, is a person who out of public life for a long time and her involvement in this situation is astonishing. The tactics of manufacturing content and planting false evidence have become a common practice by the police, as exposed in the Bhima Koregaon case with the reports by independent US-based cyber security firms Sentinel One and Arsenal Consulting.

All of this comes during a time

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wherein India is experiencing a general contraction of democratic rights and the muzzling of dissenting voices through the expansion of the scope of the UAPA law, with the Supreme Court upholding the undemocratic view that mere membership of a banned organisation is an offence under UAPA. This is also accompanied with the 22nd Law Commission of India recommending the expansion of the scope and punishments for sedition under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code. These laws have aided the state in creating a myriad of political prisoners all over India who remain incarcerated for prolonged periods of time, which is enabled by provisions of bar on Statutory bail, spectre of "National security", and delay in trial, making the process itself a punishment. States like Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh have particularly experienced rampant slapping of UAPA cases on activists, sometimes single activist having multiple UAPA cases.

While as of 17th June, 2023, charges against six of the accused,

Prof Haragopal, Padmaja Shah, V Raghunath, Gaddam Laxman, Gunti Ravinder and Suresh Kumar have been dropped but 146 of the other accused, including the late Justice Suresh continue to have these cases

filed against them. Without the complete rescinding of these charges, this is merely a weak attempt by the state government at pacifying the backlash against this case. This attempt in Telangana to incarcerate activists en

masse is a brutal attack against civil liberties and democratic rights of citizens and furthers the fascist project of silencing all dissenters from exposing the oppression and exploitation meted out by the state. □□□

## THE UCC DEBATE

# Muslim Women's Quest for Gender-Just Laws

*Sabah Khan*

**W**ITH ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS scheduled in four states and the general election coming in a year, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has whipped out the Uniform Civil Code (UCC), a tried and tested formula. Accordingly, the 22nd Law Commission has issued a notification seeking views from religious and other organisations on the UCC. No draft of the UCC has been shared for comments, so one understands that this notification simply seeks to serve as a reminder that only the BJP can make the Muslims of India “secular law-abiding citizens”.

The 21st Law Commission had in 2018 stated unequivocally that a UCC “is neither necessary nor desirable at this stage” in its 185-page consultation paper on Reforms of Family Law. Yet, five years later, people see the current notification. While recognising the opportunistic politics behind this move, progressive groups, Muslims, and feminists who have been advocating gender-just laws should use it to their benefit.

In India, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains are governed by the Hindu law while Parsis, Christians, and Muslims have personal laws drawn from their respective religious texts or an understanding of the texts. Also known as family law, these laws cover issues such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. Personal laws as one understands them today were conceived under the British Raj.

The Constituent Assembly of India deliberated on the many laws required to govern the country. These included laws related to family laws such as marriage and inheritance. One assumes that effecting changes in Muslim personal laws at a time when memories of the Partition were fresh must have seemed a difficult proposition. The UCC was added to the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution with the hope that it would be enacted in the future, while reforms for Hindus, who were the majority, were sought to be enacted through the Hindu Code Bill.

Women from every community—Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Parsi, or Adivasi—have at some point challenged the unjust personal laws in their communities or approached the courts for redress. These struggles are compounded by that women have had to challenge the institution of family, often the only support system they have in the country. So gaining equal rights in law and custom has been a long and arduous struggle for women.

When Rukhmabai, a child bride, challenged her marriage in 1885, one of the many opponents to reform in the Child Marriage Act was nationalist Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Mary Roy had to fight her siblings against blatant discrimination in the inheritance laws of the Syrian Christian community in Kerala. Shah Bano had to take her former hus-

band and the father of her five children to court, opening up a controversial (albeit much needed) debate and discussion of Muslim Personal Law. Goolrukh Gupta took the Valsad Parsi Panchayat to court against its decision to disallow Parsi women married to non-Parsi men from attending the funeral of their parents. Ho women in Bihar and Adivasi women in Maharashtra have taken on their community panchayats for their rights to property and sexuality, respectively.

In spite of Hindus being a majority, the task of reform through the Hindu Code Bill was challenged by Hindu conservatives who opposed many provisions in it. B R Ambedkar resigned as law minister because the proposed Bill related to marriage and inheritance was dropped on the eve of the first general election.

After years of deliberation, Jawaharlal Nehru was able to push through the Hindu Marriage Act, the Hindu Succession Act, the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, and the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act in a piecemeal manner in the period 1955-56. It was only in 2005 that Hindu women were granted the right to ancestral property with an amendment to the Hindu Succession Act.

One would imagine that a common gender-just civil code would serve everyone well. But in the vitiated atmosphere following the Shah Bano judgment in 1985, any move to demand a reform in personal law began to be considered anti-minority. On the one hand, religious leaders within minority communities asserted their “right” to retain their



personal laws (no matter how unjust), and on the other, Hindu right-wing groups such as the Sangh Parivar had appropriated the term "UCC" to further their anti-minority agenda.

There was also the concern that a uniform law would not necessarily be gender just. Therefore, some women's groups continued the demand for gender justice and reforms in the law by abandoning the term 'UCC' in favour of an Egalitarian Civil Code or Gender-Just Laws, to differentiate their position from that of the Hindu right.

It is a myth that serves the political interests of both the Muslim and Hindu right to state that Muslims are against the UCC. Muslims are in favour of gender-just laws and believe that no one religion can provide justice to all women..

In 1978, Shah Bano filed a petition seeking maintenance from her lawyer husband. The husband, well versed in personal laws, decided to divorce her and refused to pay maintenance beyond the period of iddat. A Supreme Court verdict in 1985 granted her relief but it led to protests by conservative Muslims who believed the court had interfered with the Shariat law.

In 1983, Shehnaaz Shaikh, who went on to start Aawaaz-E-Niswaan, a women's organisation, filed a petition in the Supreme Court against a number of provisions of the Muslim Personal Law of 1937. In 1999, women's groups from across the country working with Muslim women formed the Muslim Women's Rights Network. It had the following four-point agenda for reform of the Muslim Personal Law:

- Ban on triple talaq
- Ban on polygamy
- Equal guardianship and custody rights for Muslim women
- Maintenance rights of Muslim women

Later discussions of the Network added the right to equal inheritance to its agenda.

In 2004, some members of the Network worked towards a gender-just nikahnama (marriage contract), laying down the terms of marriage, including for mehr (money or possessions paid by the groom to the bride at the time of marriage), divorce, and rights after divorce. The formulation of this nikahnama forced the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), a non-governmental organisation often mistaken to be a government body that represents Muslim interests to formulate its own nikahnama, which also laid out the terms and conditions for divorce. The draft of this anti-woman nikahnama by the AIMPLB was condemned by Muslim women, who at a press conference in 2005 tore up a copy of it while branding the AIMPLB a misogynist organisation that was not representative of Muslims.

In 2007, some Muslim women activists formed the Bhartiya Muslim Mahila Andolan (BMMA) to address the issues Muslim women faced. One of its main objectives was the codification of the Muslim Personal Law, doing away with the unjust practices followed in the name of Islam. When Shayara Bano challenged her triple talaq in court, the BMMA, the Beebaak Collective (founded in 2013 to work for the rights of Muslim women) and other organisations joined the petition, which resulted in the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019. The BMMA has submitted a draft of the codified Muslim family law to the government multiple times but there has been no response to it.

Muslims for Secular Democracy, which was founded in 2003, became Indian Muslims for Secular Democracy in 2016. It has also

been vocal against Muslim conservatism and taken a public stand on contentious issues, including the Hijab controversy in Karnataka last year.

The women's groups have also articulated the changes required in the 'secular' Special Marriage Act. They have prepared multiple drafts on gender-just laws and submitted suggestions to the Law Commission every time the bogey of a UCC has been raised.

The Mumbai-based Forum Against Oppression of Women (FAOW) proposed specific gender-just legislations in several areas such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance as early as 1995. The FAOW sees the need for laws to address social security and to broaden women's rights in heterosexual as well as homosexual relations.

The demand for secular gender-just laws advocated by Muslim women's groups recognises that Muslim women have to contest both Muslim Personal Law and the politics around the demonisation of everything that is Muslim, including personal laws.

Polygamy/Bigamy: Another aspect of the Muslim Personal Law that has been used to demonise the community is the permission for men to have four wives. A government survey of 1974 found that 5.6% of Muslim men and 5.8% of upper-

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caste Hindus were in polygamous or bigamous relationships. The numbers have since then fallen to 1.9% for Muslims and 1.3% for Hindus, according to the National Health and Family Survey (NHFS) data of 2001. Polygamy is highest among the tribal communities.

The second wife of a Hindu man, at present, is penalised for being in a bigamous marriage, which is not recognised by the law. A UCC that outlaws polygamy will leave women in these marriages without any rights.

If the UCC outlaws polygamy for all men, it must consider the rights of the second wife (Hindu or Muslim or of any other religion) in a bigamous marriage, which is now guaranteed in Muslim law. The UCC has to address the rights of women in bigamous marriages if the rights of women in polygamous marriages are being taken

away. Women should not be penalised for the actions of men.

Property rights: Much before the Hindu Code Bill granting Hindu women the right to property, Islam provided a share in property for women. As the law stands today, however, women only get an unequal share in inheritance. All Hindus are also unwilling to give their sisters an equal share of property in spite of the law as seen by the many property disputes in court today.

An equal share in property that is formalised by the law will benefit all Muslim women.

Amongst the many changes required in the Special Marriage Act is revoking the requirement of a notice period, which has been known to endanger the lives of couples in inter-religious relationships.

Muslim women seek equal rights to custody and to guardianship, and

also the right to adopt (not just for themselves but for all women in the country). They also demand that social security be provided for women and the elderly.

Apart from equality in the law related to family, the women's groups have time and again raised the need for recognition of marital rape. The provision of Restitution of Conjugal Rights is a legitimisation of rape in marriages, and it needs to be repealed immediately. Amongst the many changes required in the Special Marriage Act is revoking the requirement of a notice period, which has been known to endanger the lives of couples in inter-religious relationships, especially in recent times. □□□

[Sabah Khan has been member of the Muslim Women's Rights' Network since its inception in 1999. She is a co-founder of Parcham, an organisation working with youth towards a society respectful of diversity, celebrating difference, and interdependence] [Courtesy: *The India Forum*]

## LEARNING FROM AZAD

### The Dilemma of Liberal Muslims

Moin Qazi

*When a man is denied the right to live the life he believes in, he has no choice but to become an outlaw. —Nelson Mandela*

**A**N EDUCATED, SECULAR and liberal Indian Muslim is today in a bind; he is confronted with the dilemma of finding the right balance between loyalty to his faith and adherence to the new tests of patriotism. The high-voltage saffronisation wave demonising Muslims has broken the resistance of even strong neutral and secular groups now inclined to go with the official tide. The centuries-old worldly souls are slowly being ruptured. India has suddenly become deaf to its minorities, who are shuddering with muteness at the growing intolerance of the saffron hordes. Mocking and ridiculing Muslims is now rife in public spaces. As always, whipping up communal strife has been a criti-

cal strategy in the Hindu nationalist playbook.

The Indian secular fabric is increasingly becoming fragile. Many on either side don't believe in either tolerance or moderation and are determined to follow the age-old adage "paying them in their coin" too literally. The official machinery that had earlier been very subtle in its communal agenda is now baring its fangs brazenly.

India's once cherished and internationally lauded secular values have been desecrated in primitive majoritarian politics driven more by uncontrollable rage than by sensible reason. Not just Hindutva foot soldiers but democratic institutions and spaces are being used to suppress

religious freedom. The country is fast seeing a potential breakdown of what was a flourishing multicultural society. Muslims have to routinely confront a culture of fear which sees everything Muslim as pure evil.

Muslims in cities will tell you how difficult it is to rent a house if you are a Muslim. A sense of despair runs through the entire Muslim community, and they are passing through the most horrific phase post-partition.

Continuing political popularity has encouraged the intolerant elements, who are now openly imposing their moral benchmarks about diet, dress, faith and patriotism, totally overlooking the cultural sentiments of others. This rhetoric injects anti-Muslim sentiments into a climate where Muslims feel alienated and marginalised. The political and so-

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cial environment has never been so hostile. An ordinary Muslim is hissed and snarled with vileness by all and sundry in the full glare of the law.

India must not forget that it has an entire generation of young Muslims born into a turbulent era. Their mindset and identity are nurtured in an environment where they apprehend being suspected as the 'disloyal others'. Some are highly talented and in the vanguard of the nation's new development revolution.

The negative profiling of Muslims can cause alienation among the Muslim community. As a result of this alienation, there will be enough space for fissiparous tendencies leading to long-term fissures. Studies have shown that one of the factors underpinning radicalisation is a sense of loss of belonging and identity.

Religion is often portrayed simply as a social or political construct. However, religion is a daily practice for millions and the simple framework of an understanding that connects human lives to a spiritual reality. For the laity, faith is the prism through which they view the world, and their religious communities are their central environments. For them, it is a benign force, shorn of the political sentiments manipulated into an ideological construct by ideological groups for their election algorithms.

It isn't easy to overstate the importance of faith in the lives of people for whom it is a creed of peace and love. Most people prefer to live in peace rather than conflict. At their very core, all religions espouse peace, tolerance and compassion. Yet, often the only religious voices on the front pages are those speaking the language of hatred or violence, especially in stories about conflict or social tensions. One of the best ways of breaking down barriers between faiths is by building

relationships and getting to know each other. It's not just a platitude, but a verse from the Qur'an where the lord says, "he made us different so we can get to know each other."

Muslims are confronted with a dilemma of dichotomous loyalties. The best inspiration for them in these trying times is of Maulana Azad, the president of the Indian National Congress during the negotiation of independence and was a key ally of Gandhi and Nehru.

One of India's phenomenal freedom fighters and the first Education Minister of independent India, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, was incredibly proud of his two identities: Musalman and Indian. In the age where Narendra Modi's government is trying to separate Muslim identity from the Indian identity, Azad's words ring loud and true:

"I am a musalman and am proud of that fact. Islam's glorious traditions of 1,300 years are my inheritance. I am unwilling to lose even the smallest part of this inheritance. The teaching and history of Islam, its arts, letters, and civilisation are my wealth and fortune. I have to protect them.

As a musalman, I am interested in Islamic religion and culture and cannot tolerate interference. But in addition to these sentiments, I have others that the realities and conditions of my life have forced upon me. The spirit of Islam does not come in the way of these sentiments; it guides and helps me forward.

I am proud of being an Indian. I am part of the indivisible unity that is Indian nationality. I am indispensable to this noble edifice; without me, this magnificent structure of India is incomplete. I am an essential element which has gone to build India. I can never surrender this claim". □□□

[Source: countercurrents.org]

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## BOOKS IN BRIEF

## Facets of Poverty in America

*I Satya Sundaram*

[I Satya Sundaram has reviewed three interesting books *Poverty, The Sustainability Revolution and Path of Self-realization* in brief. All the three books deal with the multiple crises the people are facing today across the world.]

**T**HE WORLD HAS MADE rapid strides in the areas of science and technology. Yet, poverty and unemployment have become ubiquitous—only their intensity differs from country to country. Even rich countries could not eliminate poverty completely.

In the US, the poverty rate fell from 17.3 per cent in 1965 to 11.1 percent in 1973 thanks to government initiatives. In 2001, the number of poor stood at 32.9 million. Government also transferred large amount of economic resources in the form of noncash transfers in 2001, especially for medical care, food and housing.

Poverty is not evenly distributed across the American landscape. It is mainly a rural problem. Poverty rates are highest in the most remote rural areas. The State of Mississippi {Delta counties} has the highest poverty rate in America, with 12 percent unemployment rate.

According to economist, Paul Krugman, “American children born to parents in the bottom fourth of the income distribution have almost a 50 percent chance of staying there—and almost a two-thirds chance of remaining stuck if they are black”. {p,19}.

The Time magazine wrote: “Poverty in America is not about income alone. Low income communities, regardless of State, are more likely to struggle with access to affordable healthcare, they are more likely to live near toxic sites and to develop lung cancer; they are more likely to live in food deserts and to wrestle with illness like heart disease and

obesity; and they are more likely to die younger from drug overdoses”. {Issue dated May 8-15, 2023, p,28}

Experts say the official poverty calculations are under-estimates. They ignore many key factors such as increased cost of medical-care, education, transportation, and many other basic costs of living. They also do not take into account geographically based costs of living {p,33}. Also, debts too should be taken into account.

Nobel laureates Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen, along with economist, Jean-Paul Fitoussi had observed: “Income and consumption are crucial for assessing living standards, but in the end, they can only be gauged in conjunction with information on wealth”. {p,35}.

What about the gap between the rich and poor? According to Stiglitz, in 2011, the top one percent earned almost a quarter of income and controlled 40 percent of wealth in the US, while wages have declined for the middle class {p,50}. He further said an economy in which the majority is doing worse year after year is not likely to do well over a long period.

When inequality is on the rise, the government is not using its valuable asset, namely, people. Also, most distortions like monopoly power and preferential tax for special interests do undermine the efficiency of the economy {pp.52,53}. America has long suffered from an under-investment in infrastructure. The wealthy are reluctant to spend on common needs.

What is the relationship between

foreign assistance and poverty? Some say foreign assistance is a failure; others say, it has contributed to revamp spheres like agriculture, infant mortality rates, availability of potable water and other health and nutrition interventions {p,157}. It is argued that global goals can be achieved only through local action.

The argument is that if international aid is not offered to poor countries, they are unable to grow by themselves, the natural resources may deplete, while population grows. The situation may worsen.

There is a broad agreement that countries prosper, with democratic institutions that enable citizen participation, fair representation even for minorities, and efficient, responsive Government {p,162}.

Of course, Muhammad Yunus has made one thing clear. The group approach—self-help groups and microfinance—can play a vital role in minimising misery by empowering women in a short period.

The book is interesting. It presents a particular viewpoint, supported by some; and the opposite points of view advocated by others. Such books were brought out under the series *Opposing Viewpoints*.

The edited book, *Poverty*, by Roman Espezo {Greenhaven Press, Detroit, USA, Pp, 131. Price \$23} is a comprehensive one on various dimensions of poverty in USA. It has touched on all poverty-related issues.

### **LIVING ON THE EDGE**

Concerted efforts are being made towards an eco-friendly world. Yet, a solution to the problem of climate change is not in sight. Surely, we need a sustainability revolution that supports economic viability and healthy eco-systems by modifying consumption patterns and implementing a more equitable social framework”. {p.3}

Theodore Roosevelt observed



{1900}: "I recognise the right and duty of this generation to develop and use our material resources, but I do not recognise the right to waste them or to rob by wasteful use, the generations that come after us".

The industrial revolution is marked by technological innovations, increased production capacity, economic specialisation. The society must be prepared to face revolutions. As rightly observed by Thomas Jefferson: "Every generation needs a new revolution". The personal computer and the internet have had a significant impact on the sustainability revolution by facilitating the dissemination of information.

The Brundtland Report {1987} created a framework for addressing ways of protecting the Earth's ecosystems while taking into consideration economic and social justice concerns.

There are significant developments in recent decades. The national biogas programme in Thailand, the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, the current stress on renewable energy are a few examples. The sustainability revolution emerged as a reaction to the industrial revolution which caused degradation of environment. There are now sustainability groups having similar intentions and objectives. The movement enjoys decentralised leadership {p,9}.

The sustainability movement gained strength in the early 1980s, with the publication of Robert Allen's How to Save the World {1981}, and Lester Brown's Building a Sustainable Society {1981}. Brundtland Report Our Common Future {1987} is also an important document. Brown drew attention to ecological limitations.

The National Step {NS} was founded in 1989 by Swedish oncologist Karl -Henrik Robert. In 1995, it was brought to the US. It has branches

in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, South Africa, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The four system conditions of NS are {Pp 59-61}:

1. In order for a society to be sustainable, nature's functions and diversity are not systematically subject to increasing concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth's crust.
2. In order for a society to be sustainable, nature's functions and diversity are not systematically subject to increasing concentrations of substances produced by society.
3. In order for a society to be sustainable, nature's functions and diversity are not systematically impoverished by physical displacement, over-harvesting or other forms of eco-system manipulation.
4. In a sustainable society, resources are used fairly and efficiently in order to meet basic human needs globally.

While studying sustainability of natural resources, one should remember: {i} resource renewal versus non-renewal, and {ii} short-term versus long-run. Sustainability of non-renewable resources requires recycling of existing materials and shifting to renewable alternatives. In the case of renewable resources, industries must follow sustainable practices while remaining competitive {p, 76}.

The Asilomar Declaration for Sustainable Agriculture stands for food systems which are ecologically sound, economically viable, socially just and humane {p,90}. It draws attention to the need for preserving and promoting the farming lifestyle and rural communities {p, 93}. But, there are many challenges.

Addressing ecological issues is no easy task. People have to rely on collective wisdom and positive efforts worldwide to find out solutions.

The book, The Sustainability Revolution by Andres R Edwards

{New Society Publishers, Gabriola Island, Canada. Pp.207. Price: US/ Canada \$16.95} throws useful light on sustainability principles, ideas, concepts and indicators.

### **TOWARDS SELF REALISATION**

In these days of mounting mental tensions, everyone wants peace. But, it is not easy to attain. Chakravarti Narayan Shrimali has said in his foreword to the book: "We are all on an incessant voyage. We are undertaking a journey of finding our own true self. This is not an easy path to tread, but those who toil hard gets the sweetest fruit... Realisation about our ignorance, aim, purpose of our sole existence can bring special and unending joy in our life".

Service has been the essence of Indian culture. Man's avaricious proclivities pulverised the desire to help others. The author has rightly observed: "Performing a service is not possible with a pensive mind. Simplicity is a precondition for having senses of service" (p, 29)...

We always try to assess others, but we completely ignore the more important thing—self assessment. We realise our fault only when we are

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under the influence of real Guru. This is the only way to enrich our lives. We have many negative thoughts. For instance, arrogance is the biggest hurdle in the way of attainment of consciousness (p, 11). Of course, our ego is fiercely attacked by learned persons. The author said: "Self realisation can be achieved only through wisdom. It can only be perceived. The perception is possible only with the help of a person who himself symbolises right perception." (p, 28).

Liberation from bondage is also

an important aim of human life. The author has observed: "Liberation is when the chitta (mind) does not long for anything, grieves about anything, reject anything, or hold on to anything and is not pleased or displeased about anything." (p, 99). In other words, a stoic attitude to life is important. The author has also observed that liberation could not be achieved even in heaven, if ego is there (p, 100).

The author opined that when the causes of pain are understood, the pain disappears. He comes to know

that the pains are all caused by his own doings. He then feels absolute peace (p, 104).

Very few understand the meaning of liberation and renunciation. To avoid the challenges of life, some may take up sanyasa. Such people not only bluff others, but also cheat themselves (p, 158).

The book 'The Path of Self Realization' By Sanjiv Kashyap, [Vikas Prakashan, Bikaner, Rajasthan Pp, 247, Price: Rs.595] throws useful light on the nuances of human life. Its message is crystal clear? □□□

PACKIYANATHAN AHILAN

## A Sleepless Poet

*Asok Chattopadhyay*

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH found out no essential difference between the languages of prose and poetry. Packiyathan Ahilan, the Tamil poet of Sri Lanka, not unlikely finds out any line of essential difference between the imagery of poetry and that of an art work. His poetry appears to be a harbinger of poetic scenario and at the same time of a pictorial art that speaks much more than one can hear and imagine. His poems at times explore an 'intimate relationship' in, and not without visible arena, a language of violence causing to war, so inflicted, between his language of poetry and that of his artistic pullout.

P Ahilan was born in 1970 and has seen the world since fifty years. But what he witnessed in his motherland, the devastating war on the people of Sri Lanka and the dreadful resultant, has made him much senior to his contemporaries in the wide space of undergoing toughest experiences others haven't. He witnessed the truculent civil war, occurred between August 2008 and May 2009, causing seventy thou-

sand people killed and more than three lakhs being 'internally displaced'. And this experience he shared in his languages of poetry and that of artistic view.

He unhesitatingly chooses characters either from Indian mythology or that from Greek to depict his narratable narrative through which he endeavours to enter into his readers' feeling, heart and sensation and to get them attacked. If anything he is somehow succeeded in reaching to his goal. In his 'Manto's women' he depicts a narrative:

*As I approached,  
she mechanically removed  
her underwear?  
In the bloody trench  
a thousand penises swarmed.*

*I bathed her in water  
and from her brain,  
plucked each penis.*

In his 'Landscape of Iranaipalai' he writes:

*Amid the raining rockets  
as I ran for life  
a dying voice  
rose from the ground.*

*A woman's torso, naked,*

*a void, with nothing below;  
two protruding bones,*

*Nothing else.*

His poetic voices mourn for the gone ones for they haunt him all through the times. He teaches at the University of Jaffna and an archivist too and is involved in 'archiving Jaffna's heritage' for more than two decades. He is one of the co-founder of Sri Lanka Archive of Contemporary Art and Design (SLACAD) in Jaffna relating to the contemporary art of Sri Lanka.

He admitted that all the foreign literature he read through Tamil. Once he was so much influenced with the poems of Anna Akhmatova and the stories of Chingiz Aitmatov, both the Russian literateurs. His poems speak for his knowledge of Indian and Greek mythologies also. Moreover he got through the Chinese poetry and the poems of Pablo Neruda and Gunter Grass.

He said: Those who spent the 'past four decades' in Sri Lanka cannot forget all that happened 'in our own different ways'. It has somehow got 'profoundly rooted' in him. He cannot escape it. Moreover the poet lost her 'little sister' in her childhood that had dug him the print of 'permanent loneliness'

The poems of Ahilan, as Geetha

July 23-29, 2023

FRONTIER

11

Sukumaran, a poet and translator, feels gathering under Mithunam 'are important registers of the interior space'. She has written :

The term mithunam, which derives from mithuna in Sanskrit, refers to sexual union on both physical and spiritual level, drawing multiple interpretations from Hindu religion and philosophy. This group of poems explores an intimate relationship within the language of violence, a language of the exterior in the surreal landscape of war. The mor-

bid internal landscape of these poems is unusual in Tamil poetics; readers are forced to leave this poetic oeuvre struggling to maintain any sense of reassurance.

In this poem Ahilan writes :

*On the bed  
of fiery words  
we sleep,  
two corpses  
on either side,  
after frigid sex.*

*Under the sheet  
of thorns,*

*strangers bound  
by fate,  
wear a dream  
with worms squirming,  
imagining  
a parched future  
with two pairs  
of tearing eyes.*

The poems of Packiyathan Ahilan is no doubt horrible in portrait, loneliness in love, sleepless in war field all the night under the starlit sky having no light to read the lines of the dead left. □□□

RW/ May 28, 2023

## VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

# Authoritarianism in Action

**Notan Kar**

**A**LL HUMANS REST IN societies together—as was stated by the U N declaration of Human Rights in 1948. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

This statement defines that each and every human is entitled to enjoy all rights. Human rights are fundamental to human existence. But human rights were always violated in human history. The rulers used to oppress people and did not grant their rights as they are entrusted with. Even religious leaders in some cases were responsible for the violation of human rights.

The human rights movement in India started during the British regime when nationalist movement was going on. That is why the human rights movement in India is intertwined with the nationalist movement. A historic public meeting was held under the monument in Calcutta in 1931 to protest against the police firing on the prisoners of Hijli (Medinipur) Jail. Kabiguru Rabindranath Tagore strongly pro-

tested the police firing in the meeting. In 1936, at the initiative of Pt Jawaharlal Nehru, the first human rights association was formed in India which was known as 'Indian Civil Liberties Union'. Rabindranath Tagore became the first president of the association. The Association made a concerted effort to organise protest movements and build people's awareness against police brutality, persecution of political prisoners, government bans on political parties and mass organisations and extrajudicial detention etc. The movement for human rights in the pre-independence period was in many issues associated with the wider anti-British movement. The Anti-Roulat Bill movement, Jallianwala Bagh massacre protest, Simon Commission boycott movement etc. were deeply interlinked with anti-British and human rights movements.

The rulers who came to power after independence also showed extreme indifference towards securing human rights and civil rights of the citizens of India. Successive rulers in India continued to enact black laws following previous British laws. In July 1948, the Congress government

at the Centre banned the Communist Party of India and extreme state repression was carried out against communist workers across the country. State terrorism intensified in West Bengal to suppress the communist activities. Scientist Meghnad Saha, politician Sarat Chandra Bose, intellectual Khitiprasad Chattopadhyay and others with many civilians joined the protest against state terror in West Bengal. On their initiative, a human rights organisation named 'Civil Liberties Committee' was formed in West Bengal in 1948. In 1975, the state of emergency was declared and freedom of speech, rights of the people were seized.

At present when the ruling class at the centre is celebrating the 75th year of independence 'Amrit Mahatsav', human rights are being severely violated and curtailed in India. The attack has been intensified much more. Human rights are constantly being violated in Jammu and Kashmir. These days severe tor-

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**ALAIGAL VELIYEETAGAM!**

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ture on common people is routine in the state. Disappearing, killing and arresting people on suspicion of terrorist activities has become a daily occurrence in the state. According to the report of 2018 published by the 'Coordination of Civil Service Society', a joint human rights organisation in Jammu and Kashmir mentioned that about one lakh people especially the youth of the state had been missing or killed so far. Since a long time, human rights have been suppressed in north-east states especially Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram by the imposition of 'Armed Forces Special Power Act' (AFSPA). Recently people are acquainted with the incidents that happened in Manipur in various media. Since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came into power in Uttar Pradesh in 2017 till date around 90 people have been killed in the name of encounter. Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra bear no testimony of exceptions. People saw the killings of minorities in Gujarat riots with the direct indulgences of the administration in 2002. Most citizens know the episode of Bilkis Banu. Likewise, last year Muslims were

killed with the direct indulgence of the rulers in Delhi riots. Students and citizens protesting against the Citizenship Amendment Act in Delhi had been arrested. Student leaders Umar Khalid, Sharjeel Imam and many others are still imprisoned under the UAPA clause. The Bhima Koregaon case prisoners are still being held arbitrarily in the jail without trial. Journalists in India, even today, cannot publish their factual reports. Siddiqui Kappan has recently been granted bail after nearly two years in jail for sedition. Extremists shot dead Sujaat Bukhari in Kashmir for his outright speaking. For a long time, there have been repeated appeals from the citizens for the repeal of draconian repressive laws from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Gujarat to Manipur. But the governments appear not to be proactive in withdrawing the draconian laws, instead the BJP government that came to power at centre in 2014 making more strict laws for curbing human and civil rights of the citizens.

West Bengal also is no exception in terms of human rights violations. Citizens' democratic rights have been

repeatedly undermined more from state tyranny in the last seventies to the present government. Frequently right to expression, civilian meetings are stopped by the administration on various pretexts. Political prisoners are still being held in prisons without trial. Most of them are imprisoned under UAPA. There are currently 72 political prisoners in various jails in West Bengal including women prisoners. Seven political prisoners died in jail during the Trinamool government's eleven-year rule.

Human rights are not at all protected in India. The main barrier to the protection of human rights in India is severe wealth inequality and poverty. Most people in the country still live below the poverty line. Every year starvation deaths make headlines. It is not possible to protect human rights if the needy people cannot get food, medical treatment, shelter and employment.

Last year a US report cited significant human rights violations in India including alleged unlawful and arbitrary killings, challenges to freedom of press, interference with privacy and violence targeting religious and ethnic minorities. □□□

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## REMEMBERING ANAND

### From Bellampalli to Dandakaranya

**V Subrahmanyam**

*"The tyrant dies, and his rule is over; the martyr dies, and his rule begins."*

**A**NAND IS NO MORE. BUT his ideas and ideals, the spirit of sacrifice, his indefatigable revolutionary zeal and his relentless revolutionary practice will inspire generations.

Anand, Polit Bureau member of the CPI (Maoist) Party, passed away on 31 May 2023, due to a heart attack, in the dense thickets of Dandakaranya. His body was laid to rest amid party veterans, the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army

(PLGA) fighters, and the people of Dandakaranya. In his death, the Indian revolutionary movement lost a Che Guevera of Latin America and a Vo Nguyen Giap of Vietnam. He was the Secretary for the Central Regional Burueau (CRB) from its formation in 2001 till 2017, when he stepped down for health reasons.

Anand, Pratap, and Dula were nom de guerre of Katakam Sudarsan.

Sudarsan was born to working-class parents from a sleepy coal

mine town of Bellapalli, then in Adilabad District, now in Mancherial District, 69 years ago. Kannala Basti was a typical working-class slum, sans any basic amenities, like scores of such colonies of workers of Singareni Collieries. Singareni Collieries has been a good revenue earner for the government since its inception. It supplied coal to the entire South India.

Srikakulam peasant armed struggle was to twin Telugu states, what Naxalbari, called the Spring Thunder, was to the entire country. Making rupture with the revisionist parties, Vempatapu Satyam and Adibhatla Kailasam, who were till then in the CPI(M), followed the



July 23-29, 2023

FRONTIER

13

footsteps of Charu Majumdar, the architect of Naxalabari struggle, ignited the Srikakulam uprising in 1969 but the sparks of this rebellion in the north-eastern tip of the combined Andhra Pradesh was too soon quelled by the government by 1972.

But the embers were still alive, and soon, the die was cast to rejuvenate the revolutionary movement. Kondapally Sitaramaiah, a veteran of the Telangana Peasant Armed Struggle of 1948-51, was a visionary and put in Herculean efforts to initiate the Peoples' War which rose like phoenix, again after a five-year lull. CPI(ML) (Peoples' War)'s efforts came to fruition in the eruption of militant peasant struggles in Karimnagar and Adilabad districts by 1978. Anand was one of the key persons in leading the Adilabad peasants uprising along with Shyam, Gajjela Gangaram, Puli Madunaiah and Palle Kanakaih.

Anand did his diploma in Mining in Hyderabad in 1974. He came into touch with Radical students and played a vital role in establishing RSU (Radical Students Organisation) and spreading it. During the Emergency, he clandestinely organised Singareni workers and had sown seeds for a powerful workers' movement under the leadership of Singareni Karmika Samakhya, which shook the ruling powers. The lifting of the Emergency saw a typhoon of peasant struggles in the Karimnagar and Adilabad Districts. He concentrated on building the Radical Youth League and organising Singareni Coal workers. But Anand soon left home, never to return, to take up higher responsibilities, went underground, worked as an organiser in Jannaram-Luxettipet area and soon became the Adilabad district committee member of the CPI(ML)(PW).

Who can forget the Indravelli massacre of tribal peasants of Adilabad on 20 April 1980? The

tribals- Gonds, Kolams and Paradhans- of Adilabad lost vast swathes of lands that they had been cultivating for ages to the idiosyncratic and inhuman policies of the government that usurped their lands and planted trees to make the forest commercially viable to generate revenue for it. The Adivasi Peasant Association organised an open meeting at Indravelli to discuss these issues. The police, with a conscious plan of nipping the growing people's movement in the bud, fired upon the masses gathered at the place, hunted the tribals while escaping and killed scores of Adivasis. It was a post-1947 Jallianwala Bagh massacre.

Anand, along with the team of his co-activists, kept the peasant struggles' fire unextinguished, despite the terror created by the Indravelli massacre. Peasants cleared commercial trees like acacia, teak, etc., and began to plough their fields. Peasants resisted the police with their traditional weapons. Satnala is one such example. This mass rebellion slowly took the shape of people's militia and regular armed squads. CPI(ML)(PW) State Committee formed eight guerilla squads from Telangana. One of the squads entered then Chandrapur district of Maharashtra from Chennur of Adilabad district after crossing the river Pranahita. Just two days after, in the police firing by Maharashtra Police Peddi Sankar(23), a squad member, became a martyr on 2 November 1980. PUDR, in its Fact Finding Report- Death by Encounter- called it a cold-blooded murder in the name of 'encounter'. Peddi Sankar hailed from Bellampalli. These fledgling efforts, meandering many tortuous pathways, reddened with the blood of thousands of martyrs, to form the People's Army began in 1980 and succeeded in developing a formidable people's

guerrilla army by the beginning of this century. People Guerrilla Army was formed on 2 December 2000, on the occasion of the first anniversary of the martyrdom of . Shyam, Murali and Mahesh, who were killed in cold blood precisely a year ago.

The rise of Anand- from the District committee to the forest liaison committee and later into the Forest committee in 1987 was concomitant with the development of the revolutionary movement from Karimnagar and Adilabad to the entire North Telangana and Eastern Districts of Andhra Pradesh Agency area and to the Central Indian Districts of Dandakaranya- Bastar and Gadcheroli. Anand became the Secretary of the North Telangana Special Zonal Committee in 1995. He was taken into the Central Committee in 1995 in the All India Special Conference. He became a Polit Bureau Member when Peoples'War and Party Unity merged into a single party. He remained a Polit Bureau member when the People's War and MCCI merged to form

CPI (Maoist) in 2004.

Anand had been in all the weals and woes the Party went through. He had seen the high points of movement of expansion of the Party to nooks and corners of India, the spread of a few guerilla zones into multiple ones- from North Telangana and Dandakaranya to vast areas in Bihar and Jharkhand, and transforming guerilla warfare into mobile

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warfare; and formation of Janatana Sarkar (Revolutionary People's Councils) in vast areas of Central India, Andhra-Odisha Border zones, in Bihar and Jharkhand regions. As CRB Secretary, he effectively guided and neutralised the counter-insurgency vigilante movement- Salva Judum, led by Congress' Mahendra Karma, supported by the BJP government and sponsored by big business groups like Tatas. Though the Party could not sustain the movement in the North Telangana areas, the PLGA and the Janatana Sarkars have been fighting a hard struggle— in the various phases of unprecedented encirclement and annihilation campaigns by the lakhs of Central Paramilitary forces, beginning from the Operation Green Hunt sketched by the then Home Minister Chidambaram in 2009. Taking the mantle from him, Amit Shah vows to make the 2024 Maoist Mukta Bharat that missed many such earlier deadlines.

While forming Janatana Sarkars and leading the people's war in Telangana and Dandakaranya, Anand edited underground magazines like- Kranti, Erra Jenda, People's War and People's March. Between 2008 and 2012, he keenly investigated land relations in Adilabad. His finding confirmed the

CPI(Maoist) analysis that despite distorted capitalist relations, the rural scene in India is semi-feudal. Anand's introduction to Pani's book, Janatana Sarkar: A Maoist Experiment in Dandakaranya, shows his in-depth knowledge of the history, the understanding of the complexity of the contradictions, the candid admission of severe difficulties in establishing the base areas like in China, but his confidence that it is not an impossibility reassures the concerns that are raised by even the well-wishers about the Protracted People's War in India.

Anand built revolutionary movement. But a lesser-known fact about Anand is that he penned a novel: Vasantha Geetham (Song of the Spring), published under the pen name Puli Anand Mohan that depicts the peasant uprising in Adilabad in its initial stages. A recent novel by Hussain's Tallulu- Biddalu (Mothers, Sons and Daughters), is a saga of revolutionaries from Bellampally centring around Lachchavva, mother of martyr Gajjela Gangaram, depicts a fair picture of movement and the activists who led it from Adilabad—the struggles of coal mine workers and peasants. This novel reminds readers of Gorky's Mother. Recently HMTV channel played a rare audio of Anand speaking about the people's role in the revolution. Anand, exuding confidence in the victory of the revolution, emphasised the enormous importance of the role of the masses and reminded the role of the party in the revolution as a midwife. Anand said: "Though it is a long way to achieve New Democratic Revolution and Socialism, we are well advanced in the path of revolution. It might not be possible to achieve the desired change as and when we want. Many factors come in between. People should come forward to make the revolution a success. Undoubtedly people

will soon strongly come forward and participate in the revolution. The party is just a midwife of the revolution. People are the real backbone of the revolution." Allam Rajaiah, a celebrated writer and member of the Revolutionary Writers' Association, said: Anand's exposition that people are the real makers of history in a nutshell can indeed be expanded into a few creative novels".

For two years, Anand had been the media representative of the Central Committee. The Hindu Correspondent Ravi Reddy recently wrote that Anand was the first top leader from the CPI (Maoist) Party to start a culture of interaction with the media. He remembered that Anand gave the interview to six journalists after assuming as the Secretary to the North Telangana Special Zonal Committee. Mallepalli Laxmaiah, a senior journalist then at Suprabhatam, said that Anand was very soft-spoken and discussed the "agrarian crisis, farmers' suicides, and repression on the naxal movement" at length in that interview.

Abhay, the media representative of the Central Committee of CPI (Maoist), while announcing the death of Anand on June 2, remembered his role in the revolutionary movement and paid rich tributes and gave a call to observe memorial meetings country-wide from June 5 to August 3, 2023.

A memorial meeting was conducted at Bellampally. Many sections of people visited the house of Satish, the younger brother of Anand and paid tributes to the departed revolutionary leader. Pani, an Executive member of the Revolutionary Writer's Association and many mass organisation leaders paid glowing tributes to Anand. Pani said that Anand was a towering revolutionary intellectual and one of the pillars of the Dandakaranya movement.

□□□

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## LETTERS

**Modi, Putin and Xi**

The leaders of Russia, China and India—the three biggest powers bidding to reshape a global order dominated by the US—convened over video at a virtual summit meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation [SCO], and each focused on their own driving issues.

The annual meeting—which was established by China and Russia in 2001 and includes Pakistan and Central Asian countries—offered no dramatic statement of changing alliances. But it did give a glimpse of how a regional bloc formed to counter Western influence might coalesce and navigate their competing priorities.

There was no mention of the mounting friction between Beijing and New Delhi over border disputes and India's membership in the Quad, a security-focused coalition with the U S that China views as a tool to contain it.

Xi Jinping, China's president, instead reiterated long-held grievances against the U S by calling for an end to "hegemonism" and "power politics". Narendra Modi, India's prime minister, urged the forum to condemn countries that "use terrorism as an instrument of their policy"—a veiled reference to Pakistan, which India accuses of sponsoring militants in the Kashmir region.

President Vladimir Putin called for a new "multipolar" world, trying to project solidarity with powers unaligned with the West. He tried to display strength and domestic stability in the aftermath of the uprising by the Wagner mercenary group.

SCO may go the SAARC way. SARRC is a regional grouping having no prospects of becoming a regional power due to presence of Pakistan. As China continually backs Pakistan against India, New Delhi has no option but to side with America in Quad against China. Also, Russia-China strategic partnership has no military component against America. What China wants

is to contain America economically. Their idea of multipolar world is unlikely to take any concrete shape anytime soon.

*A reader, Kolkata*

**Protection of Adivasi Identity**

Prof Virginius Xaxa—who headed the High-Level Committee set up by the Prime Minister's Office to probe into "the socio-economic, educational and health status of tribal communities"—has said that uniform laws have proved "detrimental" to the interests of the Adivasi communities.

In an online interview, Prof Xaxa said that the laws imposed from the top had negatively affected the Adivasi society, eroding their customary practices and taking away their resources. Instead of such laws, he supported the policy of respecting cultural diversity and ensuring the vulnerable groups their rights, given by the Indian Constitution.

Elaborating on this issue, Prof Xaxa said the need of the hour was to protect the Adivasi identity and defend their interests. He argued the imposition of the uniformity was not desirable as thrusting upon the Adivasi communities generalised [uniform] laws had adversely impacted them.

Prof Xaxa, who taught sociology at several prestigious educational institutes before his retirement, said that the uniform laws were justified in the name of the larger public good, but they resulted in nullifying some of the protective provisions given to the Adivasi community by the Constitution. "The generalised laws have been detrimental to Adivasis", he added.

Former deputy director of Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Guwahati), Prof Xaxa, therefore, opposed the imposition of uniformity. He expressed disappointment that the discourse on the uniform civil code was being carried out without seeking informed consent of the people, particularly those who

were the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

**Abhay Kumar, New Delhi  
Leader of the Voiceless**

India's 300 million Dalits are largely unrepresented in mainstream media. But Dalit journalists are changing that with news platforms dedicated to telling their stories.

Meena Kotwal comes from a family of manual labourers and grew up in a Dalit neighbourhood in the Indian capital of New Delhi.

She became a journalist and worked for several mainstream media outlets. However, her experiences as a young journalist made her realise that a major part of Indian society was being overlooked.

In 2019, Kotwal launched an online news platform called Mooknayak, which means "leader of the voiceless". Along with 14 journalists coming from diverse social groups in India, Kotwal aims to highlight stories of Dalits and other marginalised groups that go unreported in mainstream media.

The name for the platform was inspired by the architect of India's constitution B R Ambedkar. She runs her newsroom on the donations that she receives from crowdfunding. Recently, she secured funding from the Google News Initiative.

The news outlet publishes articles in both Hindi and English for wider reach. They shoot videos for their YouTube channel, aiming to cover stories that others do not, including atrocities and social injustices faced by Dalits.

Kotwal runs her news platform from Pushpa Bhawan, the same Dalit neighbourhood in Delhi where she grew up.

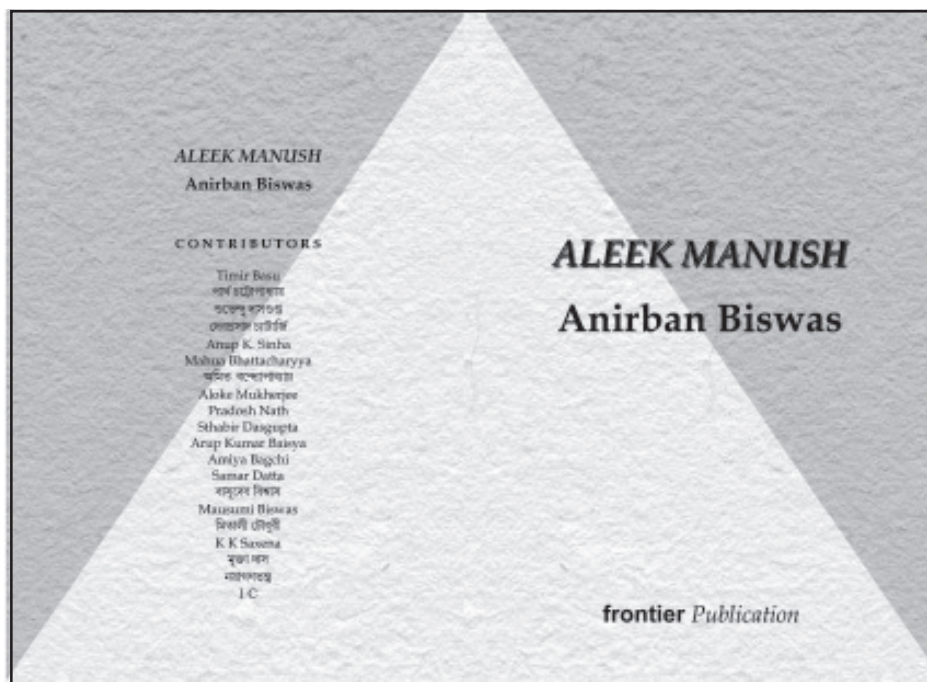
The Hindu caste system dates back thousands of years and places around 300 million Dalits at the bottom of a social hierarchy.

According to a recent report, nearly 88% of journalists in India were from the general category or upper caste in 2019. Today, that percentage remains nearly unchanged.

*Adil Bhat, New Delhi*

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