

frontier

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Many Loose Ends

ON JULY 31 THE SUPREME COURT CAME DOWN HEAVILY ON the Centre and the state government of Manipur for their failure to contain 'communal' and sectarian violence going on for the last three months and underlined the need to restore faith in the Constitution. Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud, Justice J B Pardiwala and Justice Manoj Misra asked why the May 4 incident in which two women were gang-raped and paraded naked in the streets of Manipur was registered on May 18—after 14 days and a month more to record the statement of victims. The union government was literally on the back-foot and the Attorney General and the Solicitor General looked defensive as they were actually defending the indefensible—the Modi government's calculated silence and strategy of inaction. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was downplaying the Manipur mayhem while launching a massive anti- Bengal campaign, rather anti-Trinamul government campaign because of poll-related violence which was no doubt bone-chilling. In essence the court sent the message that 'Bengal cannot be compared with Manipur'. In other words what is happening in some parts of the country—Rajasthan, Chattisgarh or Bengal—cannot be an excuse to avoid the responsibility to stop continuing ethnic conflict in Manipur. After the top court's observation the ruling Trinamul Congress of Bengal may heave a sigh of relief. But criminalisation of politics has gripped all parties, ruling and opposition as well. Opposition parties are demanding a statement from Prime Minister in parliament but the BJP is refusing to oblige them for reasons best known to them. The BJP dismissed the visit of members of opposition bloc 'INDIA' to Manipur as a show-off. But they said nothing about the high-powered BJP fact-finding team that visited Bengal to assess how panchayat poll became bloody in some areas. The rapes, slaughter and destruction in that little state have appalled the world. What is even worse is the complete paralysis of the government, both local and central. Economic activities have come to a halt, with children unable to attend school, farmers ceasing their farming and people grappling with both financial losses and psychological hardships. Prime Minister is evasive and silent. Many think this is silence of complicity. There has been little or no attempt by the government to bring about healing and reconciliation. Nothing in recent years has matched the horrible and brutal violence.

For one thing Meiteis and Kukis have lived together for generations in spite of occasional tensions. This implacable hostility at the moment that

has created a civil war like situation has surprised all. It is hard not to see the evil design of the ruling party—BJP—here with its policy of ‘divide and rule’.

The whole country has reacted in anger and shame. But it is not enough to force the persons in authority to accept their guilt and step down.

The role of media barons in reporting Manipur is anything but dubious. That the Modi regime enjoys blessings of big media houses is a fact of life. TV channels are in a rat race to appease Modi.

The Modi government is side-track-

ing the Manipur crisis in every possible way. Now a Chinese angle has been added to the Manipur imbroglio. Only the other day the former army chief M M Naravane accused China of fuelling ethnic insurgency in India’s northeast for decades. The ex-army chief’s narrative at this stage when Modi’s party is harried at home and abroad may help them to refurbish their tarnished image.

Meanwhile, echo of separate administration in the hills of Manipur gained currency. A few days after riot broke out on May 3, 10 Kuki legislators had demanded a separate

administration for their community. The very idea of division of Manipur forced thousands of Meiteis to react and organised protest rallies across the state opposing the demand of separate administration. If the majority community continues to stick to its hidden agenda of ethnic cleansing the logical culmination will be more violence and separation in the end. Unless all stakeholders are given equal importance and respect no negotiated settlement will emerge anytime soon. The majority Meitei and minority Kuki are in reality battling over land and influence. □□

COMMENT

‘Demographic Dividend?’

THE WORLD’S DEMOGRAPHICS have already been transformed. Europe is shrinking. China is shrinking, with India, overtaking it this year as the world’s most populous nation.

By 2050, people age 65 and older will make up nearly 40 percent of the population in some parts of East Asia and Europe. In all of recorded history, no country has ever been as old as these nations are expected to get.

As a result, experts predict, things many wealthier countries take for granted—like pensions, retirement ages and strict immigration policies—will need overhauls to be sustainable. And today’s wealthier countries will almost inevitably make up a smaller share of global GDP.

This is a sea change for Europe, the United States, China and other top economies, which have had some of the most working-age people in the world, adjusted for their populations. Their large work forces have helped to drive their economic growth.

Those countries are already aging off the list. Soon, the best-balanced work forces will mostly be in South and Southeast Asia, Africa

and the Middle East, according to UN projections. The shift could reshape economic growth and geopolitical power balances.

No doubt people are living longer, healthier lives and having fewer children as they get richer.

When birth rates fall, countries can reap a “demographic dividend”, when a growing share of workers and few dependents fuel economic growth. Adults with smaller families have more free time for education and investing in their children. More women tend to enter the work force, compounding the economic boost.

Demography isn’t destiny, and the dividend isn’t automatic. Without jobs, having a lot of working-age people can drive instability rather than growth. And even as they age, rich countries will continue to enjoy economic advantages and a high standard of living for a long time.

Countries with a very high proportion of children today will have fewer child dependents and more workers in 2050. Many are in Africa, Asia or Oceania. If enough jobs are not available they will have to face a catastrophic situation.

More than a million people have taken to the streets in France to protest raising the retirement age to 64 from 62, highlighting the difficult politics of adjusting. Immigration fears have fuelled support for right-wing candidates across aging countries in the West and East Asia.

The changes will be amplified in Asian countries, which are aging faster than other world regions, according to the World Bank. A change in age structure that took France more than 100 years and the United States more than 60 took many East and Southeast Asian countries just 20 years.

Not only are Asian countries aging much faster, but some are also becoming old before they become rich.

Pension systems in lower-income countries are less equipped to handle aging populations than those in richer countries.

In most lower-income countries, workers are not protected by a robust pension system. They rarely contribute a portion of their wages toward retirement plans, as in many wealthy countries.

Countries are categorised as having large working-age populations if people between the ages of 15 and 64, an age group commonly used by demographers, make up at least 65 percent of the total population. □□

[Contributed]

NOTE

Keeping Away GM Corn

Bharat Dogra writes:

THE GOVERNMENT AND people of Mexico have been involved in a struggle for several years to protect their staple food corn from serious health and environmental hazards linked strongly with imports of GM (Genetically Modified) corn and contamination of local corn with GM corn. However they and their protective efforts face the deep opposition of their neighbour and superpower the USA. In saving these protective efforts from the onslaught and threats of the superpower the government and people of Mexico need worldwide support, particularly from farmers' movements, health and environmental movements as this is a very important struggle for all. Important stakes are involved for the health and environment and for all of humanity, and indeed for all forms of life, as Mexico has become the most important country for the struggle against GM crops (although of course the struggle in other countries like India is also very important).

Some Mexican groups and organisations with roots in rural and indigenous communities have shown widely appreciable clarity and deep understanding of this important issue of increasing concern to people

and farmers all over the world.

While the government of Mexico in recent years has been taking very commendable steps in opposing import of GM corn from USA, its position on this issue has not been equally strong compared to some grassroots organisations. The government is opposed to import of GM white corn most directly used for human consumption but not so much to import of yellow 'industrial' GM corn despite the fact that industrial use may include use in processed food and multinational companies may mix GM and non-GM corn. The Mexican government also has to worry about very heavy opposition from the USA where the GM agribusiness lobby is fully supported by the USA government. Even a tariff increase on white corn import, despite the self-sufficiency Mexico has in this, can lead to much unjustified pressure from across the border, as has been seen recently and earlier too. This is why wider support from all over the world for Mexican government is so much needed today in its efforts to protect food safety and sovereignty.

One reason for excessive constraints faced by the Mexican government relates also to the trade agree-

ments it has entered at regional level involving the USA and Canada--NAFTA followed by USMCA. What has been observed in Mexico should be a lesson for other governments including India regarding how unjust and unequal trade agreements can become a big hurdle in such crucial domestic areas as protection of food safety. Provisions of trade agreements and their interpretation have been used in such a way as make it more and more difficult for Mexico to protect as crucial an interest as its food safety.

As many senior scientists have warned, there are very serious health hazards associated with the consumption of GM crops as food and with the use of herbicides like glyphosate which are used as a part of a package for growing some of these crops. When it could not altogether avoid import of GM corn, Mexico tried to reduce these health hazards by diverting a lot of the imported corn to industrial use and to feeding animals. But one way or the other, through meat or dairy food consumption or processed food for example, GM corn would still enter the food chain and health hazards would be there.

An even bigger concern for Mexico was to save Mexican agriculture and its local varieties from genetic contamination caused by GM crops. So attempts were made to prevent imported GM corn from being used as seed. □□□

BURNING MANIPUR

In Search of 'Chitrangada'

Saswati Datta Roy

AMERE 2,500 KM AWAY, both physically and mentally, Manipur has never really captured people's attention. Unfortunately Manipur stays untouched from public gaze.

Manipur, the land of Chitrangada. What a charming tale lies hidden within its borders! Once upon a moonlit spring, Manipuri princess Chitrangada bewitched the mighty warrior Arjuna with her

beauty and fiery spirit. Oh, what a wonderful drama of love and detachment intermingled with each other! The fragmentary epic weaves profound passion unfolding amidst grand national politics. Being framed in this mythical, mystical romance, Manipur becomes an enigma entwined with legendary tales.

Yet, mainland people never bothered to "recognise" Manipur in their

socio-economical as well as political space.

But suddenly, a flicker of light reveals the truth—medieval barbarity has engulfed the land! The violence against two girls shocks everybody, and social media profiles turn black in solidarity. The aggrieved indulge in cartoons, posts, and poems to express themselves, as if that would change the bitter reality.

For the past two months internet connection of entire Manipur was severely shutdown and the state was doomed in total isolation. The condition is suspicious, but mainland people just ignore it. In fact, Manipur, Manipuri Net or Manipuri Fate—it's all the same to the people.

But now, due to compulsion of circumstances people change their mindset, want to protest eagerly and raise voice:

*“Why the drum beats and beats
Hey the watchman?
The blue door has knocked by
the cloud-army—
Why the drum beats and beats
Hey the watchman?
The freighted door
And the closest floor
Shivers down terror
Ho watchman, why the drums
beat and beat with tremor?”*

(by Sankha Ghosh)

On 27 April, the Manipur High Court in its verdict awarded the Meiteis the Scheduled Tribe status. But did the Manipur government speak up then? No, they maintained calculated silence, indifferent to the rights and emotions of the other scheduled tribes. The looming storm of discontent was evident, but they chose to pretend it didn't exist.

The court's order became visible to the public like a rare comet streaking across the sky. Then chaos and lawlessness followed suit, almost like an orchestra playing the symphony of unrest.

“We'll not comply, nor shall we

accept”.—A tribal solidarity march took place consisted of Kuki, Naga and Jomi community on 3 June against this verdict and clashes erupted like popcorn in a hot pan. The Kuki-Naga-Jomi communities didn't want to get involved in the mess consciously, but they were in trap! Then, from that night itself, clashes began in Manipur. The intensity of this clash was so violent that within just two days, by May 4th, the number of dead had surpassed 70. Internet services were suspended. Countless lives were shattered, disconnected from modern India.

The rest of the country got to know the situation bit by bit through various reports and analyses breaking free from the womb of silence. The Manipur government did not utter a single word on this verdict at that moment. The government seemed sufficiently indifferent to the rights, emotions, and pride of the tribe. The high court's decision, accepting Meiteis' recognition, was not well received by other communities, so the government preferred a policy of silent stalling.

This stillness obviously indicated an imminent storm. When the recognition of one community happens, it may create deprivation, inferiority, and frustration among other groups, even if their rights of water and forest remain unaffected.

But how the elites, the astute society of Manipur perceived this looming cloud of darkness is honestly, a matter of curiosity?

To quench this curiosity, the news of two girls being stripped and paraded was brought to light on July 19th. But even before June, the country's National Commission for Women's Chairperson, Rekha Sharma, had been informed about this incident in detail. In a recent interview, Rekha Sharma explicitly stated that she had been informed in writing about the atrocities against women of the Kuki-Jomi commu-

nity. Even more astonishingly, the truth of this matter has been revealed by Rekha Sharma sending three letters to the Manipur government in the past three months. But the Manipur administration has not even acknowledged the receipt of those letters until now.

In other words, the enlightened were not blind at all! But the problems were not taken seriously by the Manipur government or the police administration for some unknown reason. As a result, the reputation of the nation was plundered, the 'consciousness' slipped out and fell in the threshold of the nation.

All the Kuki, Naga, Jomi communities certainly did not wish to be involved in the conflict. The desire for a non-violent resolution with the National Women's Commission was evident in a section of Manipur civil society. Even amidst this lawlessness, there undoubtedly exists a united “Manipuri” identity, like that of an undivided Bengali. But when internet services were cut off in the month of May, the rebellious voices couldn't reach outside Manipur. Unfortunately pain of Manipur didn't resonate everywhere.

Before saying ‘Shame,’ before protesting against nudity, it is better to accept this truth. Actually, the common people, have never considered them their own.

A fake video was released and circulated in the market to instigate the conflict between Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. What was in that video?

This was a fabricated video, with a blueprint of an assault and rape scene. The date mentioned in the video was May 3rd. A female nurse was being assaulted. On the night of May 3rd, the incident took place at Churachandpur Hospital in Manipur, where the nurses were attacked by a group known as ‘Kuki-Naga’ extremists.

However, the video was mislead-

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ing, and everything changed when the fire broke out. The conflict escalated quickly due to the intense fire that engulfed Manipur. What happened next?

On May 4th, in a village near Thoubal district, there was an attack by Meitei militants. According to the statements of a 21-year-old girl who was a victim of the attack, the perpetrators were heavily armed with AK-47, INSAS, and SLR rifles.

How did these heavily-armed individuals with modern AK-47s, INSAS, and SLRs reach the hands of a special group so quickly? Even a self-loading rifle (SLR) or AK-47 cannot be found in the open market. Not even the state police have access to such armaments. How did a fully equipped modern group gain control over them so quickly?

As a result of this unjust aggression, the helpless villagers were forced to flee. This exodus brought a Kuki family to the shelter of a nearby jungle, accompanied by two women from the village. Escaping the atrocities, harassment, and murders made their entry into the jungle difficult. Perhaps their tribal instincts had made them forest-dwellers.

The whole night passes in fear, and in the morning, the family returns to the village. On their way back, they see a police vehicle from Nongpok police station. The terrified and fearful family thus seeks refuge with the police and the police team sets off on a journey to provide them with a safe place to stay for their protection.

However, while returning to the police station, the criminals surrounded them on the road. The assailants brutally murdered the 21-year-old survivor's father and younger brother right in front of the police without any hindrance. According to the survivor's statement, the assailants threatened to kill all three women. Afterward, they took the

two women completely naked to a paddy field, threatening to rape them, then and there. They said, "Lay down. We will rape you. Your boys have raped our girls."

But since she knew some of the men, who were present there, she wasn't raped.

The video of the incident, where the naked women were constantly being groped by others was posted on Twitter. Until then, the two women were not assaulted further as they were known to the criminals.

While the women were being undressed, they were threatened by saying, "either undress yourselves, or we will kill you", the police was standing, being a silent audience. Before the video was circulated everywhere, the police or the state was the first to witness this with their own eyes.

After May 4th, as a result, fourteen days were spent in spellbound horror. Then, on May 18th, with the help of the head of Bifineam village in Kangpokpi district, the survivor filed a 'Zero FIR' in the same district's Saikul police station. On June 21st, Manipur police filed an FIR, and felt that the "great duty was accomplished", and satisfied with their work, they peacefully slept for another thirty days.

Manipur continues to burn. The whole of India witnesses the fire and the entire nation turns a deaf ear, returning to their own concerns.

After the video went viral, "India Today" reported it first. Within approximately twenty-four hours, this nudity, this appalling incident, pierced the entire nation with shame. Manipur's police-administration-chief minister's delayed slumber is shattered. And at around 1.30 am, only one boy was arrested for this crime.

However, the two naked women were clearly held by seven to eight hooligans, each of them were clearly visible in the video. With a little

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investigation, each of them can be identified and traced.

Meanwhile, the democratic netizens were busy, blissfully unaware, sipping tea, pretending like nothing was happening.

Now people finally felt a hint of shame! Manipur is just a pawn in the prudent political game.

So, Manipur continues to burn, while the rest of India turns a blind eye and goes about their daily lives. The parliamentary session has already begun. Just 78 days after the incident, the Prime Minister has spent only twenty eight seconds discussing the "sad events" of Manipur. Although, outside the parliament, he stated that he was disturbed, pained, and angry at the event, which has brought shame to civilisation. He promised that the culprits will be punished, and strict measures will be taken. However, this statement was not recorded in Lok Sabha, though it was reported outside!

Why is there such a hush-hush about this issue? How did the conflict reach such a dangerous level in both central and state territories where the same government is in power? Is what's happening in Manipur still not a conflict? If it is a conflict, there are two clear sides. Is it between Meiteis and Kukis? Or is it a Vaishnav vs Christian conflict? 246 churches were reportedly burnt. Like the war be-

tween the Pandavas and the Kauravas, what is this claim of “taking everything, even women”? So, even in a matriarchal society, does it mean that women are just objects, usable for marketing and buying?

Why is the oppression of only two or three women highlighted while the bigger issues are not addressed? If Meiteis are being ethnically integrated, why are Kukis being targeted? Is it the fear that leads them on the path of violence? Do Kukis participate in solidarity marches with the Naga Jomi? Is their unity a threat to Meiteis---the supposed elites? Are they so superior that they disdain any attempt to uplift the consciousness of the supposedly backward, and take their AK-47 to Kuki villages?

*“Love blooms amongst palash,
Ashok, shimul.*

*But the greedy teeth still shine.
The colourful spring fails to find
the meaning of life,*

*And you are deceived by the tremendous
treachery.*

*You live in the house of cards,
Doing everything per rules,
And you often think to yourself,
Who are they?*

*Sitting right above you,
Taking accounts of your every
move, calculating everything?”*

(by Ranadev Dasgupta)

Behind these extreme exaggerating expressions of shame, disappointment, and resentment, is there any other major truth being suppressed? Is there a bigger imposition of totalitarianism happening in Manipur? Is Manipur victim to any separatist movement or contemporary despotism that people are unable to grasp?

The civilised people of India, often forget that a huge amount of people of this great grand nation still lives with the wilderness of the forests in their heart. The forest is not merely a weekend venture to them like urban people. To them the jungle is a concept incorporated with dream and

destiny, ego and self esteem.

Then, in this fiery spring, amidst the hustle and bustle of media coverage, can there be any real solution? Is it a tricky power-game by which the episode of ‘Khandav-dahan’ is faded whereas the ‘Dyutakrira Parva’ along with the ‘Vastraharan Parva’ highlights with a prompt cunning way?

An unfortunate history is repeated. The Forestry Rights are on stake! The glorious era of Lord Dalhousie’s masterstrokes, the art of political trickery reached its zenith. And now, in the realm of Independent India, one witnesses the reincarnation of forced land acquisition through the sacred law of jungle decimation, all cleverly wrapped in a circular by the Environment Minister on 28th June. Oh, how convenient for those private corporations seeking to devour the forests for their selfish interests!

So, if one dares to defend the rights of the wilderness, be prepared to be labelled as a rebel, a traitor or a terrorist! Tragically enough, the Kuki, Zomi, and Naga people, like the mythical creatures of ancient tales, are now branded as enemies of the state.

Manipur, the jewel of the north-east, is showered with the “benevolent” inclusion of the elite into the corridors of power. Yes, the good old Divide and Rule policy is alive and kicking, albeit with a modern twist of “ethnic cleansing.” And how wonderfully systemic it is to decorate the massacre of forests while turning a blind eye to the real villains! People conveniently forget that beneath Manipur’s mountainous embrace lies a wealth of precious minerals, eagerly coveted by the big business.

China’s creeping invasion, Bangladeshi immigration crisis and Indian corporates’ potential exploitation of Vanishing Manipur; the democratic rights of this forsaken land

stand at the mercy of opportunistic greed. Who will speak for Manipur? India or China? Who will triumph over the jungles--- the corporate rules or the tribal community like Kuki, Naga, Zomi or Meitei elites? Then Manipur is no more than an “Object of Desire” to the powers that be, a mere pawn in their eternal game of control. Who will be its master? Who shall claim its sovereignty?

What does Manipur want? What does it desire? The nation hardly gives it a thought. And the so-called proponents of democracy seem equally disinterested.

Today, as the canvas of spring paints itself red with the blood of resistance, the media’s fleeting glances and moments of conscience prove futile in finding any real solutions.

In the grand drama of Manipuri Nupilal revolt, the courageous tales of “Mairi Paiba” and “Ima” echoes through history’s corridors. But honestly, on the political stage of Manipur, the magical music of Manipuri flute and the enchanting verses find no place.

Instead, people witness the birth of a blue-printed conspiracy to steal Manipur’s bountiful land and minerals.

Time is of the essence. Time is slipping away! It’s time to embrace the timeless courage and March boldly towards Manipur’s embrace, where the fire of resistance shall be nurtured.

No, it’s not the charming Kuki damsel who is suffering; it’s India’s beloved democracy that has been violated. It’s the protest against injustice that’s being looted. While the mighty Kumbhakarna snores, the opposing voices gain strength, constantly and constantly.

“Why does the watchman stay silent? Why does the watchdog not bark?”

Honestly, what a time to be alive! What a delightful time to be an Indian! □□□

INTERVIEW

Communalism Today

[Ashis K Bose from *The Quint* spoke with Ram Puniyani on contemporary politics of India. Excerpts:]

AB: You have conducted extensive field studies in northern India, especially in riot-torn places at the time of and after the Ram Janmabhumi mobilisation. What is your current assessment over the communal situation in those places?

RP: The places that have witnessed communal violence have become very much polarised and the physical and emotional walls have been erected between religious communities. While the majority community harbours the misconceptions of hate against the minority community, the minority community's primary sentiment is that of fear and insecurity.

The joint celebrations at social and religious level have come to a total halt. The core values of nation and fraternity have suffered a severe jolt. The wounds of communal violence have mostly remained unhealed.

The major obstacles to this had been the failure on the part of the State to give justice and rehabilitate the victims of violence. The places that have suffered the violence may not see the repetition of violence in immediate future as the polarisation in these places is close to complete, and communal forces behind the violence do not achieve much by repeating this in the same place, by and large. But in the country overall the provocations needed to flare up the violence are many and easy to instigate. The hate against minorities is the dominant feature of the present political discourse.

AB: Scholars have maintained that the Gujarat riots represented a distinctively new cultural moment in the long history of Indian communal violence similar to that of the 1984

Sikh massacre in which people were similarly targeted. Can you discuss the theoretical and evidentiary basis for the aptness of such a classification?

RP: The anti-Sikh pogrom of 1984 and Gujarat carnage and other acts of anti-Muslim violence are not comparable. The violence against the religious minorities can be broadly categorised into two groups. One is the anti-Sikh violence, which was a lone event and came up as a sort of insane political revenge against the hapless Sikh community. The other is a regular repetitive violence against Muslims and Christians, which is a part of the Hindu nationalist agenda.

What they share in common is the mechanism of violence against the innocents. The violence appears to be spontaneous, but there seems to be a planning behind it. Those in leadership generally get it organised in such a way that it appears to be spontaneous, 'bottom-up'. This bottom-up is incited by the ground already prepared due to the hate spread against the minority communities.

In the case of anti-Sikh pogrom, it was a single event, orchestrated as revenge against the killing of Indira Gandhi, which in turn was due to Operation Blue Star, prompted by the occupation of Golden Temple by Khalistani elements. The Gujarat carnage was orchestrated on the pretext of Godhra train burning. The list of Muslim households and shops was ready, and people were incited by taking the burnt bodies in a procession from Godhra against the advice of the then local collector of the city – Jayanti Ravi. The violence began with the blame on minority community that 'they' burnt the train; locals, particularly subalterns,

were roped in to take 'revenge'.

The anti-Muslim violence is regular and repetitive; it's a part of Hindu nationalist agenda aimed at polarising the communities and to reap the electoral dividends. The violence is organised by inciting the 'bottom' and by letting participants know that they will enjoy impunity. While mechanism of violence creation is similar, the underlying politics is very different in both.

AB: What is the rationale that binds a large majority of the lower-caste population behind the Hindu nationalist project and the Bharatiya Janata Party?

RP: The BJP is the electoral wing of Hindu nationalist politics. Its parent organisation has floated many organisations to work among Dalits and Adivasis. Through its vast network of shakhas, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has trained a large number of pracharaks (propagators) and swayamsevaks (volunteers) who work on ground level, at community level among these sections of society.

They first begin with religious machinations, promoting Hindu religious festivals among these sections. During the 1970s and 1980s, their volunteers promoted Vinayaka (Lord Ganesh) festivals in Dalits localities. They used to initiate the process,

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support with funds and involve the Dalit communities and introduce Brahmanical norms among them.

In Adivasi areas, they organised Shabari Sangams. Shabari is an Adivasi character in Ramayana who offered berries to Lord Ram. She is a symbol of poverty and destitution. The RSS has built temples to her and promoted her as the goddess of Adivasis. This is also a cultural messaging as to who is the idol of the tribals.

Also, they started moulding Lord Hanuman as Adivasis' deity and initiated multiple campaigns to popularise him in Adivasi areas. This again is a sort of messaging—loyalty to Lord Ram, who has been projected as an icon by the Hindu nationalist forces. This helped in co-opting these sections at religious level towards the RSS version of Hinduism.

At the social level, they regularly interacted with these communities, giving them a feeling of respect. Their regular interaction gave the impression to these communities of being honoured, and consequently being won over at electoral level despite the BJP opposing reservations, diluting reservations through introduction of quotas based on economic basis, and avoiding caste census, among others. It is pure ground-level community interaction, undertaken at massive scale, which has prepared the ground for the BJP making gains amongst these sections of society at electoral level.

AB: According to one perspective, the 'deepening of democracy' hap-

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pened in India after the 1980s. The emergence of the BJP as a major force in the country also happened in the same period. How do you perceive the deepening of democracy in India and the simultaneous emergence of the BJP in India?

RP: It is true that democratic process has been deepening in the country. This process gives articulation to subaltern sections of society as well. With deepening democracy and coming up of Dalits and women in the social space, a section of society felt threatened and resorted to communal politics.

In the 1980s, this manifested first as anti-reservation riots in Gujarat, then anti-Other Backward Classes promotion policy in 1985, and later opposition to implementation of Mandal Commission.

In reaction to this [social justice measures], the privileged section of society rallied behind the BJP and the politics of communalism to strengthen its electoral power.

The BJP-RSS stand for the values of pre-modern, pre-industrial caste and gender hierarchy and by the 1980s, the social transformation towards equality started showing up in rudimentary form. It was this which gave a fillip to the already existing BJP mechanism. The BJP is not the primal force in deepening of democracy in India. As a matter fact, it has taken advantage of the process of deepening of democracy to make inroads for an agenda which cuts the very roots of democracy.

AB: Certain scholars are of the view that the Modi era in the Indian politics will not last long and are pointing towards the emergence of a new political configuration based on Hindutva other than the BJP. How realistic are such expectations in your understanding?

RP: The Modi period of Indian politics has wrought havoc on the plight of average people of society.

The rising unemployment, the increasing prices, the worsening poverty, increasing rich-poor divide, and social polarisation has made the large sections of people aware about the negative impact of the continuing BJP rule. The declining press freedom, worsening indices of democracy and freedom of religion has raised a severe alarm among most sections of society.

The BJP government is insensitive to people's plight as demonstrated in its response to farmers' movement (in which nearly 650 people lost their lives), to the effort to disenfranchise Muslims through National Register of Citizens and Citizenship (Amendment) Act leading to Shaheen Baugh movement and then the orchestration of Delhi violence, and lastly ignoring wrestlers' complaint against sexual harassment.

The use of Enforcement Directorate, Central Bureau of Investigation and Income Tax Department against the Opposition leaders has made them aware of the dangers of the Modi dispensation. In addition, Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra and the result of Karnataka assembly elections have brought massive change in the political horizon. Now opposition political parties more than before feel the need to come together and form a political electoral front for democracy and secularism.

There are lots of obstacles in its path but as the matters are developing, there is a good possibility that the united opposition by fielding a single candidate against the BJP candidates in the elections may succeed in coming to power. This seems easier said than done as the BJP is vastly equipped with thousands of RSS pracharaks, lakhs of swayamsevaks, many RSS affiliate organisations who work for the BJP's success in elections. The BJP has media on its side aided by the IT cell and social media network carry-

ing its message. It is also the richest political party in the country. It may play some tricks yet again to polarise the society apart from the already floated Uniform Civil Code and the issue of national security.

AB: It is said that the electoral fixation towards the BJP can be sizably stemmed by educating a large segment of the Indian society. Do you think if the electorate in rural and urban areas is educated, they will stop voting for the BJP?

RP: No doubt education has an immense role in electoral awareness. It was also joked that the BJP is not

able to make inroads into Kerala as that state is very literate. But that apart, mere formal education is no counter to the BJP politics.

The RSS and its vast network of shakhs, Sarswati Mandir chain of schools, and Ekal Vidyalayas popularise its version of history, culture and politics which makes a strong case for the BJP's success. This is aided by pro-Modi media, BJP's IT cell, and a large number of print media which spreads the BJP version of politics. This is what Noam Chomsky called 'manufacturing consent'.

In Indian scenario, the 'social com-

mon sense' among large sections of society is constructed on communal lines; the religious minorities are demonised by using history. The medieval period of history is used to demonise the Muslim community by propagating that Muslim kings destroyed Hindu temples, Islam spread by force, and Muslim kings were cruel to Hindu subjects. The demographic issues related to increase of Muslim population is attributed to religion in popular parlance, and the threat of Muslims becoming a majority in the country is used to polarise section of Hindus. □□□

JOAN ROBINSON

Commemorating 40th Death Anniversary

Harsh Thakor

2023 COMMEMORATES THE fortieth year since the passing of Joan Robinson and her one-hundred-and-twentieth birth anniversary. Without doubt she was one of the most illustrative, logical and creative Marxist economists of her time, whose role path was breaking. Joan Robinson manifested Marxism to deliver a knockout punch to the conventional bourgeois economists and with unflinching resilience withstood all winds of capitalist ideas.

Since her death in 1983, modern economics has been taken to another dimension. Despite a completely new perspective at mark ups and imperfect competition and lack of competition, the assumption of perfect competition ('potential' if not actual) was restored and is well entrenched in economic analysis; Marxism has revived an interest in questions of value, the rate of profit, and inequality; and Keynesianism has crystallised into New Keynesianism and Post-Keynesianism. With political economy facing unparalleled challenges, the fortieth anniversary of Joan Robinson's death

and the one-hundred-and-twentieth anniversary of her birth in 2023 are most timely periods to analyse review her work and critical observations on twenty-first-century economics.

The outstanding endeavours of Robinson's career awaken or enliven economics profession and policy makers to address our problems of inadequate demand, rising margins with falling competition, and widespread and seemingly intransigent inequality and its consequences. For Robinson the goal or objective of our discipline is in understanding the real world to pave path for all global citizens to enjoy life to the fullest.

Despite establishing her international reputation in the Marshallian tradition of economics, she came to regard her generalisation of John Maynard Keynes's theories and their integration with Kaleckian and Marxian insights as her more progressive contribution, along with a resilient evident -based thought rebuking inductive mathematical modelling. Among an impressive body of work, three books by Robinson mark key moments in the evolution of her

ideas: *The Economics of Imperfect Competition* (1933), *An Essay on Marxian Economics* (1942), and *The Accumulation of Capital* (1956) (Marcuzzo, 2003).

By the end of the 1930s, Robinson wanted to integrate academic and Marxian economics together in a quest for a more realist theory of the rate of profit and income distribution, along with clarifications on Keynes's concept of full employment and the nature of technical progress and a long-period theory within the Keynesian framework. The product, *An Essay on Marxian Economics* (1942), was her most important work in terms of laying the foundations of her sustained challenge to the orthodox economics. Here she adopted Marxian insights to evade Marshallian orthodoxy. It is the story of how the originator of imperfect competition made further inroads into a theory of exploitation.

In 1933, she made her international reputation with brilliant work within the orthodoxy on imperfect competition, offering an internal critique of the marginalist theory of distribution. Only a decade later, her reflections on reading Karl Marx persuaded Robinson to question the Marshallian methodology, in particu-

lar its polite theory of income distribution which became so incongruous during and after the depression (Marcuzzo, 2003).¹ Finally, in 1956, she had the courage to follow the logic of her argument to examine the whole neoclassical theory of income distribution and its predominant method, facing the might of the now dominant American economics profession in the [in]famous capital controversy. She had to accept the pyrrhic victory of her interlocutors accepting she was right, yet the profession moving on regardless.

The Economics of Imperfect Competition is certainly Robinson's most popular, evergreen, long lasting or sacred work. It is often seen as a radical evaluation of Marshallian analysis. However, the book improvises methods more than breaking away from Alfred Marshall. It undertook the whole method of market analysis, re-fabricating and perfecting it, further constructed a technical apparatus to tackle markets in general, and eliminated some of Marshall's ambiguities. After Robinson's re-evaluation it is perfect

competition that became a special case of what in general is a monopolistic situation (Pasinetti, 1987).

Robinson became one of the members of a group of young economists known as the 'Cambridge Circus', whose members included Richard Kahn, Piero Sraffa, James Meade and Austin Robinson. These economists met regularly to discuss the evolving drafts of Keynes's future General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money. Keynes, having been a part-time in Cambridge and part-time in London, teaching more orthodox monetary theory and policies during Robinson's time as a student at the beginning of 1920s, was now a more interesting figure to her. His ideas and the discussion taking place at the 'Cambridge Circus' were a rupture with the economic legacy at the time and a major penetration into the social problems associated with unemployment.

A positive outcome of the Cambridge Circus was Robinson's Essays in the Theory of Employment (1937a) and Introduction to the Theory of Employment (1937b). Written as guides to follow Keynes's General Theory, these two works ascertain, that effective demand and how investments determine savings. In the orthodox theory, the rate of interest remunerates one's sacrifice for saving and, thus, for supplying capital. A clear demarcation or leap from this is the understanding of investment as an independent variable and saving as being determined by investment, which means that "the rate of interest cannot be remunerating anybody's 'sacrifice'" (Pasinetti, 1987).

During these years, one witnessed Robinson reverting to her life-long journey to confront the marginalist theory of distribution and re-formulate economic theory. For Pasinetti (1987), she was very cautious in her early years, trying to build a solid

analytical foundation. Once sure of this 'equipment', she would become gradually fiercer and more impatient with dogmas, "fighting for new unorthodox ideas" (p. 4). Robinson was not satisfied with either economics, orthodoxy or what would become known as Keynesianism (or 'bastard Keynesianism' as she renamed its denuded theory later). She never forgave the disaster of having more than a million workers unemployed at the time when learning that it was logically impossible for unemployment to prevail because of Say's Law. Keynes proved the Say's Law wrong, but Robinson wanted more.

Her baptism with Marx's ideas in 1936 through her review of John Strachey's The Nature of Capitalist Crisis (1935) in 1936 and her friendship with Michal Kalecki² paved the way to her journey. Approaching Marx with a mere fascination, she wanted to examine "what his economic theory had to teach orthodox economists and Keynesians" (Harcourt and Kerr, 2009, p. 10), while also expecting Marx to "make her economics more 'real', to address the inequities of the capitalist world" (Harcourt and Kerr, 2009, p. 34). As a result, she derived a critique of the orthodox theory of the rate of profits and tackled Marx's insights on the long-run behaviour of capitalist economies. She also concluded that "Marx's analysis of accumulation and the development of crises lay the foundation for the basis for understanding the history of capitalism" (Robinson, 1980c, p. 297). The importance of time and the large forces of capital were replacing a stabilising equilibrium system as her frame of reference.

If in 1933 Robinson offered an internal critique of Marshallian value theory, by 1942 she relied on Marx's insights to escape Marshallian orthodoxy. Her personal endeavour from

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her teenage years to understand the causes of poverty and unemployment were a dichotomy with an order based on equilibrium or the harmony of interests. Marxian economics gave Robinson an avenue to redress the system. The concept of transition from one mode of organising production to other and the understanding of economic life with regard to a conflict between workers and capitalists would complement the discussions in the 'Cambridge Circus'. Among many criticisms, it was Robinson's rejection of the labour theory of value (see also Robinson, 1950) which she considered gave her the status of "enemy by the professed Marxists" (Robinson 1978, p. 276).

By 1956, with her *The Accumulation of Capital*, Robinson embarked a clear mission to construct "a new framework for economic theory" (Pasinetti, 1987). She tried to extricate herself from the limitations of the short run and centred her attention on the problem of capital accumulation, which was for her the principal road in the development of a capitalist economy. She was convinced that orthodoxy economic theory gave insufficient attention to how wealth is accumulated over time, which for her was a very important part of economic analysis. She also asked an uncomfortable question: what is the marginal product of capital? She had tried to find the answer for it only to realise that no economist really knew. Investigating or penetrating fundamental categories, such as of labour supply, technical progress, and natural resources, she criticised the concept of 'production function' and re-evaluated it.

These three defining moments in the evolution of her ideas were substantiated by Robinson's keenness to refute the dogmas and the orthodox ideas in economics (Pasinetti, 1987). As seen in her 1962 *Economic Phi-*

losophy, Robinson was among the strongest advocates, second perhaps only to Gunnar Myrdal, in rebuking the non-neutrality of economic science and of the necessity of stating explicitly one's convictions and beliefs. In *Economic Philosophy*, she challenged detaching 'science' from 'ideology', which was a form of mathematical modelling that had poisoned Keynes and was rapidly doing the same to Harrod's growth theory, by demonstrating the extent to which metaphysical beliefs still penetrated the so called value-free orthodox structures.

The limitations of the modern orthodox theory of her time are further formulated in her *Economic Heresies*. Some Old-fashioned Questions in *Economic Theory* (1971), where the narrowness of the discipline in its scope and relevance is associated to Walras's excessive influence. For Robinson (1971), the issue of time and uncertainty would never permit the Walrasian model to be relevant to long-run growth in the capitalist economy (p. 27). Robinson also felt it was imperative to reach out to students with an alternative method to facing economic reality, which resulted in a textbook co-authored with John Eatwell in 1973 called *An introduction to modern economics*.

It is impossible to read Robinson's critique to the established orthodoxy at her time and not question whether on has done justice to her challenges with respect to incorporating time into our macroeconomic theory. She relentlessly emphasised the need to distinguish 'logical' from 'historical' time in the economic analysis, challenging the falsehood that we can go forwards and backwards in time and the implication that uncertainty, by definition, would become a regular venture of risk

Finally, rediscovering Robinson's endeavours would not be complete

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if her exceptional analytical ability is overlooked. She had original ideas projecting a strong social message from her writings. Her logical set of arguments combined with her apparatus aimed at practical actions ranging from unemployment before the war and underdevelopment to the struggle of ex-colonial nations after the war, with a special attention paid to Asia and initial enthusiasm for Communist China (Pasinetti, 1987).

Joan Robinson championed the spirit of the nation during the Cultural Revolution. Robinson also made several trips to China, reporting her observations and analyses in *China: An Economic Perspective* (1958), *The Cultural Revolution in China* (1969), and *Economic Management in China* (1975; 3rd edn, 1976), in which she praised the Cultural Revolution. Most illustratively she projected the essence of Chinese socialism, touching issues at the very grassroots to logically

convey how workers power scaled an untouched height. She left no stone unturned in whitewashing the lies of the bourgeois media projecting Red China as a regressive society.

Joan Robinson's writings have to be re-modelled or methods re-invented in accordance to the modern times, when globalisation and imperialism have engulfed every corner of the globe on a scale unparalleled and the working class has been alienated as never before. □□□

FILM REVIEW

'Oppenheimer': 'The Father of Atom Bomb'

Manohla Dargis

OPPENHEIMER," CHRISTOPHER Nolan's staggering film about J Robert Oppenheimer, the man known as "the father of the atomic bomb", condenses a titanic shift in consciousness into three haunted hours. A drama about genius, hubris and error, both individual and collective, it brilliantly charts the turbulent life of the American theoretical physicist who helped research and develop the two atomic bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II.

The movie is based on "American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J Robert Oppenheimer," the authoritative 2005 biography by Kai Bird and Martin J Sherwin. Written and directed by Nolan, the film borrows liberally from the book as it surveys Oppenheimer's life, including his role in the Manhattan Engineer District, better known as the Manhattan Project. He served as director of a clandestine weapons lab built in a near-desolate stretch of Los Alamos, in New Mexico, where he and many other of the era's most dazzling scientific minds puzzled through how to harness nuclear reactions for the weapons that killed tens of thou-

sands instantly, ending the war in the Pacific.

The atomic bomb and what it wrought define Oppenheimer's legacy and also shape this film. Nolan goes deep and long on the building of the bomb, a fascinating and appalling process, but he doesn't restage the attacks; there are no documentary images of the dead or panoramas of cities in ashes, decisions that read as his ethical absolutes. The horror of the bombings, the magnitude of the suffering they caused and the arms race that followed suffuse the film. "Oppenheimer" is a great achievement in formal and conceptual terms, and fully absorbing, but Nolan's filmmaking is, crucially, in service to the history that it relates.

The story tracks Oppenheimer—played with feverish intensity by Cillian Murphy—across decades, starting in the 1920s with him as a young adult and continuing until his hair grays. The film touches on personal and professional milestones, including his work on the bomb, the controversies that dogged him, the anti-Communist attacks that nearly ruined him, as well as the friendships and romances that helped sustain yet also troubled him. He has an affair with a

political firebrand named Jean Tatlock (a vibrant Florence Pugh), and later weds a seductive boozier, Kitty Harrison (Emily Blunt, in a slow-building turn), who accompanies him to Los Alamos, where she gives birth to their second child.

It's a dense, event-filled story that Nolan—who's long embraced the plasticity of the film medium—has given a complex structure, which he parcels into revealing sections. Most are in lush colour; others in high-contrast black and white. These sections are arranged in strands that wind together for a shape that brings to mind the double helix of DNA. To signal his conceit, he stamps the film with the words "fission" (a splitting into parts) and "fusion" (a merging of elements); Nolan being Nolan, he further complicates the film by recurrently kinking up the overarching chronology—it is a lot.

It also isn't a story that builds gradually; rather, Nolan abruptly tosses the audience into the whirl of Oppenheimer's life with vivid scenes of him during different periods. In rapid succession the watchful older Oppie (as his intimates call him) and his younger counterpart flicker onscreen before the story briefly lands in the 1920s, where he's an anguished student tormented by fiery, apocalyptic visions. He suffers; he also reads T S Eliot's "The Waste Land," drops a needle on

Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring" and stands before a Picasso painting, defining works of an age in which physics folded space and time into space-time.

This fast pace and narrative fragmentation continue as Nolan fills in this Cubistic portrait, crosses and recrosses continents and ushers in armies of characters, including Niels Bohr (Kenneth Branagh), a physicist who played a role in the Manhattan Project. Nolan has loaded the movie with familiar faces—Matt Damon, Robert Downey Jr., Gary Oldman—some distracting.

As Oppenheimer comes into focus so does the world. In 1920s Germany, he learns quantum physics; the next decade he's at Berkeley teaching, bouncing off other young geniuses and building a centre for the study of quantum physics. Nolan makes the era's intellectual excitement palpable—Einstein published his theory of general relativity in 1915—and, as one would expect, there's a great deal of scientific debate and chalkboards filled with mystifying calculations, most of which Nolan translates fairly comprehensibly. One of the film's pleasures is experiencing by proxy the kinetic excitement of intellectual discourse.

It's at Berkeley that the trajectory of Oppenheimer's life dramatically shifts, after news breaks that Germany has invaded Poland. By that point, he has become friends with Ernest Lawrence (Josh Hartnett), a physicist who invented a particle accelerator, the cyclotron, and who plays an instrumental role in the Manhattan Project. It's also at Berkeley that Oppenheimer meets the project's military head, Leslie Groves (a predictably good Damon), who makes him Los Alamos's director, despite the leftist causes he supported—among them, the fight against fascism during the Spanish Civil War—and some of his associations,

including with Communist Party members like his brother, Frank (Dylan Arnold).

Nolan is one of the few contemporary filmmakers operating at this ambitious scale, both thematically and technically. Working with his superb cinematographer Hoyte van Hoytema, Nolan has shot in 65-millimeter film (which is projected in 70-millimeter), a format that he's used before to create a sense of cinematic monumentality. In "Oppenheimer," though, as in "Dunkirk" (2017), he uses the format to convey the magnitude of a world-defining event.

The film's virtuosity is evident in every frame, but this is virtuosity without self-aggrandizement. Big subjects can turn even well-intended filmmakers into show-offs, to the point that they upstage the history they seek to do justice to. Nolan avoids that trap by insistently putting Oppenheimer into a larger context, notably with the black-and-white portions. One section turns on a politically motivated security clearance hearing in 1954, a witch hunt that damaged his reputation; the second follows the 1959 confirmation for Lewis Strauss (a mesmerising, near-unrecognisable Downey), a former chairman of the United States Atomic Energy Commission who was nominated for a cabinet position.

Nolan integrates these black-and-white sections with the colour ones, using scenes from the hearing and the confirmation—Strauss's role in the hearing and his relationship with Oppenheimer directly affected the confirmation's outcome—to create a dialectical synthesis. One of the most effective examples of this approach illuminates how Oppenheimer and other Jewish project scientists, some of whom were refugees from Nazi Germany, saw their work in stark, existential terms. Yet Oppenheimer's genius, his credentials, international

reputation and wartime service to the United States government cannot save him from political gamesmanship, the vanity of petty men and the naked anti-semitism of the Red scare.

These black-and-white sequences define the last third of "Oppenheimer." They can seem overlong, and at times in this part of the film it feels as if Nolan is becoming too swept up in the trials that America's most famous physicist experienced. Instead, it is here that the film's complexities and all its many fragments finally converge as Nolan puts the finishing touches on his portrait of a man who contributed to an age of transformational scientific discovery, who personified the intersection of science and politics, including in his role as a Communist boogeyman, who was transformed by his role in the creation of weapons of mass destruction and soon after raised the alarm about the dangers of nuclear war.

François Truffaut once wrote that "war films, even pacifist, even the best, willingly or not, glorify war and render it in some way attractive." This, this reviewer thinks, gets at why Nolan refuses to show the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, world-defining events that eventually killed an estimated 100,000 to upward of 200,000 souls. □□□

[Source: NYT]

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UNREGULATED CAPITALISM

Capitalist Dream of AI-Driven Profits

Sonali Kolhatkar

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) and how it's going to change the world is a popular topic of conversation these days. There is concern that it will generate ever-more deceptive imagery that can upend people's lives or create propaganda that can fuel mass fear. There's the ultimate fear of human extinction from the increasingly sophisticated evolution of AI. These are valid worries.

Then there's the seemingly more mundane threat that AI poses to employment. It is expressed in the form of countless stories that have some iteration of the headline: which jobs are at most risk of being lost to AI?

Most analysts predict that AI will replace graphic designers, copywriters, customer service agents, and telemarketers. Some of the most dystopian of these listicles focus on teachers and psychologists being replaced by AI.

The stories are written with the intention of predicting the coming storm so that people can prepare themselves for the future. But the headlines are also intentionally designed as click-bait, likely fuelling fear-based consumption of the stories by readers eager to find out if their own jobs are likely to be replaced by AI in the coming years. Indeed, there are several stories where vocation of journalism was in the crosshairs of AI.

The framing of "Will AI replace your job?" obscures the bigger problem that has been at work for centuries: and that is how jobs, and therefore educations, careers, and livelihoods, are at the whims of a capitalist system intent on minimising costs and maximising profits.

Indeed, Mathias Doepfner, the CEO of the German media group that owns Politico, who warned that AI could replace journalism jobs, used Darwinian logic in saying, "Artificial intelligence has the potential to make independent journalism better than it ever was—or simply replace it," and therefore, "Only those [publishing houses] who create the best original content will survive."

And while critics of AI counter that it could never replace humans because of man's innate creativity and curiosity, the point that often gets missed is that humans are the ones engaging in the great AI replacement of jobs—a small handful of humans. They hail from the rarified group of elites who sit in corporate board rooms and deliver presentations to shareholders about how they plan to maximise dividends by replacing humans with AI.

The question one should be asking isn't whether AI can replace humans. It should be: why are some humans so intent on replacing the jobs that the rest hold, with AI? Even further, why do people live in a world where they lack so much control over their destinies in the first place?

AI, like other innovations that have automated jobs, is simply a tool that can make life easier. Graphic designers already use software to digitally paint images instead of painting them by hand. If AI is a tool that can make certain jobs easier and free up time for relaxation and leisure while people reap the same or greater compensation then so be it. But it ought not to be inevitable that corporate employers will cut salaries or entirely replace

jobs with AI. That is a choice being made in a system that relies on profit motives rather than human well-being.

What one considers a vocation, big business treats as a cog in a giant wheel called "the labour market." Dire predictions of AI "disruptions" to this market cast the entire trend as almost a natural phenomenon, whose trajectory is simply out of human hands.

But the reason that AI is booming is because it translates into a giant windfall for corporations. One economic prediction concludes that "the market for artificial intelligence (AI) is expected to show strong growth in the coming decade. Its value of nearly [\$100 billion] is expected to grow twentyfold by 2030, up to nearly [\$2 trillion]."

AI is big business, perhaps the biggest of them all. The dystopia it promises is a natural endpoint—of unregulated capitalism. If the "man behind the curtain" is eager to replace labourers, why can they not rip the curtain down and replace him?

So, this writer asked ChatGPT, the popular AI chatbot that is basically a smarter Google, the following question: "Does a capitalist economic model center human [well-being]?" The first sentence of a lengthy response was, "The capitalist economic model, in its purest form, does not explicitly center human well-being as its primary objective."

ChatGPT proceeded to tell that "Capitalism emphasises individual economic freedom and the pursuit of self-interest, with the belief that this leads to overall economic growth and prosperity."

"Belief" is the operative word here. It is a matter of faith that capitalism leads to prosperity for all. There is a religious fervour that was once popularly called "trickle-down economics," underpinning a system

where reality is at odds with the fantasy of capitalist wealth sharing.

When examining broad trends, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) found that wealth inequality in the US grew significantly between 1979 and 2019. The CBO report, which is based on a nonpartisan analysis, concluded that “Increases in market income at the top of the distribution drove much of the rise in income inequality over that time.” In other words, the rich got richer because they hoarded more wealth.

It also found that “transfers increasingly lessened income inequality when transfer rates grew among households in the lowest quintile.” This technical language simply means

that when people accessed government benefits their incomes increased. It’s like saying, “People benefitted when given benefits.”

There is no need for belief or faith in a system where the government is designed to directly help the people it represents. Belief and faith are required only to prop up the great lie that a capitalist economy helps everyone prosper.

This writer finally asked ChatGPT, “What sort of economic system can replace capitalism and ensure the [well-being] and prosperity of the vast majority of humans?” The machine spat out five different options ranging from socialism to a “resource-based” economy “where

the allocation of resources is based on careful assessment and sustainable management of Earth’s resources.”

Even AI knows that there are alternatives to the current system that rules people’s lives. If capitalism can replace people, surely, people can replace capitalism? □□□

[Sonal Kolhatkar is the founder, host and executive producer of “Rising Up With Sonali,” a television and radio show that airs on Free Speech TV (Dish Network, DirecTV, Roku) and Pacifica stations KPFF, KPFA, and affiliates. Courtesy: Economy for All, a project of the Independent Media Institute. Independent Media Institute (IMI) is a nonprofit organisation that educates the public through a diverse array of independent media projects and programs.]

[Source: Janata Weekly]

LETTERS

Muslim Dalits Halalkhors

The religious restriction in Article 341 has made it so that Muslim and Christian Dalits cannot get SC status. As a result communities like Halalkhors remain downtrodden.

Though socially similar to Hindu Dalit communities like Valmikis, Halalkhors do not receive the same treatment in the eyes of the law. Hindu Dalits have Scheduled Caste status, which grants them access to government schemes and welfare measures. Halalkhors and other Pasmada castes are excluded from SC status, despite BR Ambedkar identifying the Halalkhor caste as untouchable in his 1948 book *The Untouchables: Who Were They And Why They Became Untouchables*. The 1921 census also recorded Halalkhors as a Scheduled Caste.

The absence of Scheduled Caste status keeps the Halalkhor community trapped in a marginalised state. In October 2022, the central government set up a panel to examine the issue of SC status for Muslim and Christian Dalits. In April this year,

the Supreme Court also heard a petition regarding SC status for converted Dalits. For the government to recognise the need for such provisions, it is important to understand that Muslim society is not homogeneous, and casteism, discrimination, and untouchability exist within it, similar to Hindu society.

Reservation serves as an instrument of social justice for these socially excluded castes and contributes to nation-building. It is the first step in ensuring their proportional representation in politics, education, justice, business, and other fields. Granting SC status to Pasmandas, who have faced exclusion, exploitation, disrespect, and deprivation for thousands of years, would provide them with opportunities for improvement and upliftment.

Abdullah Mansoor

Shark Fin Business

Sharks have graced the planet earth for 450 million years. Today, their numbers are dwindling rapidly, as a result of a sustained assault by profit-driven overfishing. Recently, Brazil-

ian authorities seized fins from 10,000 of these majestic creatures—many of them endangered.

A disturbing loophole in Brazil’s laws allows companies to make a fortune selling severed shark fins. So fishing fleets chasing massive profits pull in as many sharks as they can.

The only way to save the sharks from slaughter is an absolute ban on the fin trade. And it can happen! The United States passed such a ban last year, followed by the UK this year. Now Brazil must urgently do the same. Brazilian lawmakers plan to hold a hearing in the coming weeks—but to move Congress to action people need to ignite a global outcry too loud to be ignored.

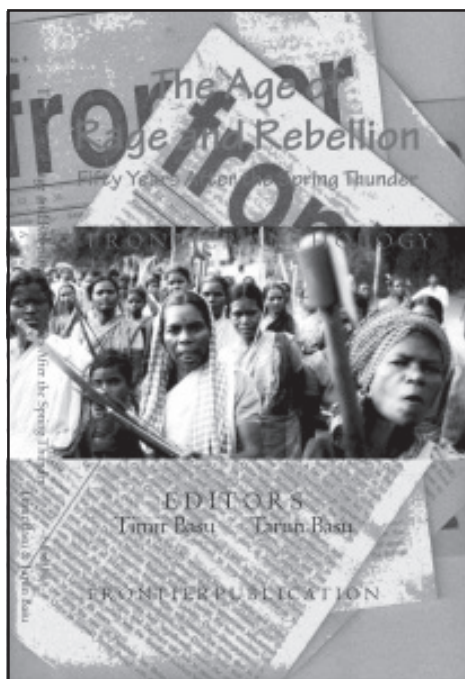
The cruelty of finning is chilling, but it isn’t the only problem. Sharks are vitally important to ocean ecosystems. When shark populations dwindle, coral reefs die, seabed grass withers, and biodiversity declines.

Yet more than 70 million sharks are killed every year just for their fins, and overfishing has put over one third of shark species on the endangered list.

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