

frontier

Vol. 56 : No. 8

ISSN 0016-2094

August 20-26, 2023

Founder-Editor : **SAMAR SEN**

On Other Pages

Comment	2
Note	3
MANIPUR REPEATING ASSAM It Is Not Hindu-Christian Binary Yogendra Yadav	4
CORPORATE-HINDUTVA ALLIANCE "Fascism and Big Business" Prabhat Patnaik	6
REVISITING UROJAHAAJ Can the 'Lower-Class' Dream? Swapnani Mukherjee Satyaki Dasgupta	7
INTERVIEW Despair among Chakmas in CHT Rani Yan Yan	8
'DIRTY WAR IN KASHMIR' Silencing a Sane Voice Joydip Ghosal	11
REMEMBERING PAUL ROBESON A Mascot of People's Liberation Harsh Thakor	12
MODI'S GLOBAL FANDOM Democracy Abroad, Autocracy at Home Arjun Appadurai	13
Letters	15

Editor : **TIMIR BASU**Assistant Editor : **Subhasis Mukherjee**

Published weekly for Germinal Publications Pvt. Ltd. by Sharmistha Dutta from 44, Balaram Dey Street, Kolkata-700006 and Printed by her at Laser Aid, 35A/3, Biplabi Barin Ghosh Sarani, Kolkata-700 067.

E-mail : frontierweekly@yahoo.co.in
frontierweekly@hotmail.com
Telephone : 2530-0065

[Typeset by THE D-COMLASER, 60 Sikdar Bagan Street, Kolkata-4, Ph : 98361-58319]

'Winds of Change'?

WITH RAHUL GANDHI GETTING BACK HIS PARLIAMEN-
tary membership after the Supreme Court's stay order on the
defamation case relating to 'Modi surname', Congress leaders
heaved an audible sigh of relief. No doubt the apex court's decision was
a welcome development for the grand old party that desperately needs a
dynastic enterprise to survive and thwart the saffron offensive. Mr Gandhi
was disqualified for a taunting remark he made in 2019 about the surname
Modi. In his 2019 comments made on the campaign trail Mr Gandhi had
cited a short list of infamous fugitives accused of large-scale fraud and
money laundering. Lalit Modi, a cricket impresario and Nirav Modi, a
diamond merchant used to get currency in those days for unscrupulous
activities. Mr Gandhi said "Why are all thieves named Modi", with an
obvious slight against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Then one Purnesh
Modi filed a complaint to a court in Surat, a city in Prime Minister's home
state Gujarat, arguing that the remarks amounted to a criminal slur against
all Modis. It led to Gandhi's conviction and finally his disqualification of
parliamentary membership and subsequent eviction from his official resi-
dence where he lived for 19 years.

That the conviction won't stand at the Supreme Court was a foregone
conclusion. In truth no reasons were given by the trial judge for imposing
maximum punishment of two years in the case. If anything court proce-
dures were used to further political agenda of Bharatiya Janata Party
(BJP). While Congress leaders and workers celebrated the event, the BJP
being taught a befitting lesson, hopes somewhat against hope that Rahul
Gandhi's reprieve will be short-lived and their euphoria over the top court's
judgement will vanish any time soon.

The BJP has been desperately trying to destroy democratic institutions
and independence of judiciary in a bid to replace the Constitution with their
version of Manusmriti-based legal framework, ever since it came to power
in 2014. How India has become a classic example of elected autocracy
over the years under the Modi dispensation is now an issue of debate,
nationally and globally as well. It doesn't require much to unearth how the
BJP hatched a conspiracy against Rahul Gandhi to keep him away from
parliament. The Congress Party thinks the reason is simple: Mr Gandhi
busted the unholy nexus between the controversial corporate tycoon
Gautam Adani and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Taking a swipe at the BJP Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge said that after the trial court's verdict it took only 24 hours to disqualify Rahul Gandhi. Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Ghelot was so charged that he lost no time to declare that their prime ministerial face would be Rahul Gandhi against Modi in 2024 parliamentary polls. After the Supreme Court's observation some disgruntled elements in the opposition camp that were not ready to accept Mr Gandhi as their leader have begun to think otherwise. In other words 'INDIA' is likely to project Rahul Gandhi as their leader despite some murmur here and there and slowly accepting and systematising the dynastic culture in Indian polity.

But the opposition or for that matter 'INDIA' is reading too much

between the lines after the apex court verdict, hoping that Congress revival is imminent. It is unlikely to happen from a single adverse judgement against the BJP machinations. Congress and its allies have no concrete agenda to confront Modi's economic programme that aims at allowing the corporates to loot natural resources as they please and destroy environment and ecology in the name of development. India today lives at many levels. Only the upper level, a tiny fraction of the staggering population enjoys benefits of Modi's much-hyped 5th largest economy.

The unemployed need employment, pensioners need cheap medicines, house-wives need reduction in vegetable prices. From Rs 33 per kilo in June, tomato prices rose to Rs 110 in July, a whopping 233 percent rise'.

Sky-rocketing prices of even life-

saving drugs have made it virtually impossible for middle class people to afford minimum health care. Everybody wants containment of inflation that erodes real income of even white collar employees, not to speak of millions of unprotected workers toiling in informal sector. For them it is becoming increasingly difficult to manage two square meals a day. Just offering promises to grant some freebies when they will form government won't work. What is needed is massive mass mobilisation but basic masses have very little faith in their credibility as the historic farmers' movement showed. Election-centric agitation is no answer to Modi's juggernaut as the BJP government is using police agencies and other supposedly independent institutions to cement his grip on power. □□□

COMMENT

Dragging On

THE UKRAINIAN COUNTER offensive, under way since the spring, is slogging through miles of trenches and minefields But Western impatience is visible in NATO capitals. They want quick victory for Ukraine. It is not happening. Their capacity to finance the proxy war against Russia seems to be exhausting quickly. The corporates in Europe are too eager to start reconstruction business in Ukraine. But stalemate doesn't mean war is over. In truth regrouping is taking place on both sides. As a negotiated settlement is not in sight Ukraine cannot avoid more destruction. Capturing a village or two in Donbas region is not going to change the ground reality. Ukrainians living as refugees in Europe have no hope to return to their country anytime soon. They are in a hopeless situation. Zelensky is lucky that he has not yet faced mass

upheaval though anti-war opinion is growing. The extent of damage to Ukrainian infrastructure is yet to be assessed.

Attacking an entrenched force, as the Ukrainians are doing now, is the stuff of military nightmares. 'The opposite side knows you're coming, they've prepared for your attacks, and their objective is to cede back as little ground as possible while making you pay in blood for every inch'. After all Russian military strategists are not fool—they know their strength and weakness.

In its wars over the past 30 years, the US has had almost every edge over its battlefield opponents, including superior firepower, complete control of the skies, advanced technology, and a superbly trained force.

The Ukrainians have almost none of these advantages. Their weap-

onry, including tanks and air defences, has been getting better, but not fast enough. They are outnumbered by the Russian army that uses untrained troops dredged from prisons as bullet sponges.

For one thing, the fact that the Ukrainians are on the offensive at all is something of a miracle. Americans tend to think of military conflicts as having the same narrative are as action movies—dramatic blowing of a whistle and a charge from the trenches. It is unlikely to happen in real theatre of war.

No doubt Ukraine survives and is taking the fight to Russia's capital city. The original Russian plan, more than a year and a half ago, was to erase Ukraine as a state in a matter of days. Instead, the Russians are now complaining about repeated Ukrainian drone strikes in the heart of Moscow, while President Vladimir Putin's forces, however slowly, are ceding back some occupied territory. Zelensky is happy that war has finally come to Russia. But these

drone attacks had been very small and ineffective—so small that they appeared to be a Russian false-flag operation. But they have had an outsize psychological impact on Putin's regime. And the western propaganda machine has some materials to sell.

The latest drone in Moscow struck a skyscraper housing some government agencies. It produced no casualties but broke a lot of glass; apparently, it also broke the Russian foreign ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova, who compared the attack to 9/11. The comparison was ludicrous!

The Poles have reported that roughly 100 men from Prigozhin's Wagner Group, the mercenaries who have been effective fighters in Ukraine

and who nearly marched to Moscow in June, might be approaching the Polish border from their new home in neighbouring Belarus. (Poland has also accused Belarus of violating Polish airspace.) The possibility of a second front cannot be ruled out if Ukrainian counter-offensive poses an existential threat to Russia. It is unlikely to happen despite inflated aid package to Ukraine.

"If there's anything that Ukraine can use in any NATO warehouse from Vancouver to Vilnius, that's a scandal". An unnamed Western intelligence official summarised recently both the hope and the danger in the current battle: "There is no reason why the Ukrainians cannot break through the Russian main defensive line", the official said. In the same

NOTICE

We are getting regular complaints from subscribers that they are not getting their copies by post. Postal dislocation is rampant. It is particularly endemic in greater Kolkata postal district. Local post offices don't really deliver in many cases because of acute shortage of staff. We request our subscribers to lodge complaints to the post offices of their localities and send their e-mail IDs, if any, so that we could also send our on-line version. —Fr

breath he said "It's not going to be easy, so we shouldn't shy away from that."

In the meantime, the summer of drones and trenches will drag on. □

[Contributed]

NOTE

Tribal Uprising in Jammu & Kashmir

NAPM writes:

WHILE THE NATION IS already reeling under the tensions in Manipur and the North-East, there is another major crisis brewing in Jammu and Kashmir. This relates to the Union Government's politically-motivated proposal to place a Bill for discussion in the ongoing monsoon session of Parliament, for granting Scheduled Tribe status to the 'Pahadi' and certain other communities that traditionally don't come under the category of 'tribe', and are rather socio-economically well-off. The tribal communities of the region, especially the Gujjar Bakarwals, have been leading a major uprising in the region since last year, opposing this anti-tribal move.

As per the Government's proposal, along with the 'Pahadis,' "Paddari", "Koli" and "Gadda Brahman" communities are also sought to be included in Scheduled Tribes list of the Union Territory of Jammu

and Kashmir. For one thing the inclusion of non-tribal, upper caste communities into ST list is a direct attack on the socio-cultural and economic rights of the tribal communities in J&K, who have faced historical marginalisation and injustices. It must be mentioned that while the Gujjar Bakarwal communities have largely been a pastoralist, nomadic community, the Pahadi communities have been more settled, engaged in land-based agriculture, business etc. and belong to dominant sections. Many experts have pointed out that the Pahadis are not a singular ethnic group, as they hail from Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities and are primarily bounded by a linguistic connection in the region.

Notably, the Gujjar Bakarwals were declared as Scheduled Tribe in the year 1991, after struggle over decades, which did help in upliftment of the community, to a certain extent. However, considering the com-

plex political situation of Jammu and Kashmir, they were not able to access all the legal rights enjoyed by tribals (adivasis) in the rest of India. While the abrogation of Article 370 in Aug'2019, reducing J&K to the status of a 'Union territory', was an unconstitutional and arbitrary move, this did pave the way for other legislations of India, including the Forest Rights Act, 2006 and SC & ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 to be applicable to the STs of J&K, alongside opening up political reservations. However, within less than 4 years, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Government which portrayed itself as a 'messiah' of the tribals has revealed its anti-tribal approach, by introducing a Bill that would severely impinge on the interests of the STs of the region.

Even as on date, Gujjar Bakarwals remain one of the most marginalised ethnic groups within J&K, largely homeless and dependent on grazing for livelihood. Multiple reports have also indicated increased repression on their access to mountain grasslands and forest commons, due to militarisation. It is a

known fact that representation of Gujjar Bakarwals in educational and employment avenues is quite low. As per 2011 census, their literacy rate was as low as 50%. In these circumstances, granting reservations to non-tribals will only adversely impact these tribal groups.

It is indeed unfortunate that based on the Justice (Retd.) G D Sharma Commission's Report, the Union Tribal Affair Ministry and the National Commission of Scheduled Tribes (NCST), which are supposed to safeguard the rights of the tribal communities, have approved the recommendation of the Office of the Registrar General of India (RGI), to include the above-mentioned four non-tribal groups in the ST list. That this happened within a month of

Union Home Minister Amit Shah's public announcement and assurance of reservations to the 'Pahadis' in Rajouri in Oct '22 is a classic statement on how decisions of such a nature are influenced by this Government.

It is shameful that the BJP is playing with the lives of the tribal communities, based on its political vested interests in the Pir Panjal area. Although it is claimed that the new reservations would not impact the share of the currently listed STs, it is only a matter of time before one sees how marginalisation of those already oppressed, would unfold. At another level, it is also a fact that the BJP Government's communally coloured reservation policy over the recent years, including the impend-

ing Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill, 2023 seeks to majorly focus on Jammu region, with a sizable Hindu population, much to the disadvantage of the Kashmir region.

The 12 tribal communities of J&K, especially the Gujjar Bakarwals, have been up-in-arms against the inclusion of non-tribal and dominant communities in the ST list. The first phase of their struggle Tribal Bachao March, began from Kupwara to Kathua, last year. The second phase of this movement picked up steam, with the proposal to place the Constitution (Jammu & Kashmir) Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendment) Bill, 2023 in the monsoon session of the Parliament.

□□□

MANIPUR REPEATING ASSAM

It Is Not Hindu-Christian Binary

Yogendra Yadav

EDWARD SAID'S ORIENTALISM is one of the most influential books in the last five decades. His classic study of Western representations of the Middle East showed how the essentialist frame of knowledge produced by the scholarship on the Orient served to justify and rationalise colonial power. This applied not only to writings that were hostile and contemptuous of the colonised societies, but also to the well-meaning and sympathetic writings on the Orient that shared the same frame.

For the last ten days, this writer has been thinking of Edward Said in the context of Manipur. At last, following the release of the horrific video, people have noticed that Manipur exists. The PM was forced to break his silence, if only for 36 seconds. The Supreme Court stepped in, though still over-cautious. The 'national' media had to acknowl-

edge the tragedy of Manipur, if fleetingly. For once, the situation in one of states in the northeast became the focus of national politics, both outside and inside Parliament. Decades-old national amnesia was punctured in a week.

Anyone who travels across the country can testify that the northeast in general and Manipur in particular are safer for women than any other part of the country. But now Manipur may be remembered for brutal violence against women. The longest serving CM of Manipur, late Reishang Keishing, belonged to the minority community of Christian Nagas. But the state may now be seen as a model of majoritarianism. Manipur was the first state in the Union of India to have held democratic elections based on universal adult franchise and is arguably the state with the most vibrant civil society and intellectual life in the hill

states of the northeast. Now it may be held out as an instance of the 'dark side of democracy'.

The present crisis will, hopefully, go away after some time. But these images may persist and percolate, just as Orientalist representations did. These residual memories may worsen the pre-existing stereotypes and prejudices about the northeast. All this would feed into Indian variety of orientalism, the distorted representation of the northeast produced by 'mainland' India that reinforces political domination and alienation.

This is not just a long-term academic anxiety. This orientalist frame has serious and immediate political consequences. It distorts understanding of the nature of the current crisis in Manipur that has persisted for nearly three months now. It misdirects energies into shallow partisanship that is bound to be counter-productive.

This tendency was first noticed in how liberal and progressive sections responded to the Assam problem. They lived in denial of the real problem of cross-border infiltration

in Assam and the resultant changing ethnic profile of the districts bordering Bangladesh. They closed their eyes and their heart to the legitimate anxieties of the Ahomiya community. They turned their back to the Assam movement and characterised it as parochial and xenophobic. Their abdication of this cause and the indifference of secular parties to address this issue have finally enabled the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to turn this ethno-linguistic issue into a communal divide. A hurried and telescopic application of high principles led to political paralysis, if not self marginalisation.

Assam is a living example of how Indian politics fails when faced with multiple victims. Ahomiyas are as much a victim as are Bengali and Jhakhandi migrants, the various plain tribes and illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. In such a situation, concerned people take the easy and the lazy way out – they choose one victim over others and build a partisan politics around it. This is bound to be a political disaster. Something similar is happening in the case of Manipur.

The problem with the belated national attention to the crisis in Manipur is not just the venom, the dodging and the vicious communal spin by the pro-establishment voices. The anti-establishment perspective, well-meaning and pro-people, is also guilty of over-simplified birds-eye-view that can be seriously misleading, if not politically counter-productive. The anti-establishment camp has rightly called out the BJP for its divisive politics, CM Biren Singh for his partisanship and incompetence and PM Modi for his imperious indifference and dereliction of constitutional duties. It has exposed the big media's designs of blaming the victims or white-washing the crime.

Yet, the liberal-secular critics tend to see the very complex situation of

Manipur through the familiar but misleading lens of politics in the Hindi belt, that of brute dominance of the majority over the minority religious communities, or that of oppression of the marginalised adivasis by the powerful caste-Hindus. It is then easy to pick up one set of victims and follow their narrative. One should not stop to ask if this north Indian frame fits the reality in the northeast. From an easy and correct identification of the culprit, namely the BJP government, people slip into a quick fix identification of the victim. Many scholars of Manipur, like Professor Bimol Akoijom, Professor Kham Khan Suan Hausing and Pradip Phanjoubam have shown that the situation is more complex.

This lens clouds the basic fact of this conflict: it is not principally a religious communal divide but an ethnic strife. The RSS might like this conflict to play out as Hindu majority vs Christian and other religious minorities, but it has not happened yet. It was and still is principally a clash between Meiteis who are mostly Hindus and Kukis who are Christians. This is not to gloss over the desecration and destruction of churches, but to recognise that the driving force of this violence is not religious communalism but ethnic communalism. Nagas, the largest Christian community of the state, and the Pangals, the small Muslims community of Manipur, are not yet a party to this dispute. There were some initial reports of attacks on the tiny Christian Meitei population, but that appears to have subsided soon.

Besides, Meiteis are not like north Indian Hindus and the extremist groups working on their behalf are not like Bajrang Dal. While a version of Vaishnavism (Gaudiya Vaishnavism) is the dominant religion for the Meiteis for more than three centuries, it has co-existed with

beliefs, practices and festivals of the indigenous Sanamahi religion. Aggressive Hinduism has largely been absent from Manipur, despite long involvement of the RSS. Militant groups such as Meitei Leepun and Arambai Tenggol, alleged to have been involved in the attacks against the Kukis, are not advocates of homogenous Hinduism of the kind Sangh Parivar would propagate. If anything, their ideological project is to resurrect the indigenous Sanamahi religion, oppose the imposition of mainland culture and indeed the dominance of the Indian state. The Sangh Parivar's project of flattening all this into mainland "Hindutva" is far from successful.

The relationship between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo people is not like the interaction between upper caste Hindus and adivasis. Though from distinct social groups with mixed history of interaction and suspicion, both are from the "same ethno-linguistic family inhabiting a small and compact mountainous region". Though technically given the status of OBCs, the Meiteis are not radically different in their socio-educational status from the Kukis who are classified as ST and enjoys significant presence among the administrative and police officials in the state. If one has to look for paral-

**Just Published
WITH THE
PASSING TIME**

by **Farooque Chowdhury**

Published by : **NGG Books**

4, Aati Bazar, Keraniganj,
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Email: nggbooks@gmail.com

Website: www.nggbooks.wordpress.com

Price: 400tk

[300tk for teachers and students,
if collected from the publisher.]

lels, one should think of the Meena-Gujjar conflict in Rajasthan, not the adivasi-savarna dynamics of Jharkhand.

Kukis have long nurtured a sense of persecution, intensified in recent times by the openly hostile attitude of CM Biren Singh. They have borne the brunt of targeted violence. They resent being targeted for opium cultivation, treated as aliens in their own land and fear the loss of con-

stitutional protections and encroachment on their traditional lands.

The Meiteis too have long lived with a sense of siege, of being boxed into a small parcel of land. They resent differential treatment among comparable communities. And they fear that the boundaries of Manipur may be violated. So, there are two sets of victims, both with apparently legitimate grievances and realistic apprehensions.

The political challenge in Manipur is to reconcile these apparently real and contradictory perceptions of victimhood, to reduce the narcissism of small differences, to build spaces for dialogue where these fears can be talked about and to ensure impartial investigation and prosecution that can be trusted to deliver justice to the victims of violence. This is going to be a long process of repair that must begin with the exit of the current CM. □□□

CORPORATE-HINDUTVA ALLIANCE

“Fascism and Big Business”

Prabhat Patnaik

FASCISTIC ELEMENTS EXIST in every modern society, but usually as fringe, marginal or minor elements. They move centre-stage only when they get the support of monopoly capital which provides them with ample money and media coverage; and this happens when there is a capitalist crisis that substantially increases unemployment and puts a question mark on the hegemony enjoyed by monopoly capital until then. The role of the fascistic elements in such a situation is to provide a diversion of discourse, so that the basic distress of living under a capitalism afflicted by crisis, is sought to be covered up through the spread of hatred and antagonism against some hapless religious or ethnic or linguistic minority; in addition of course there is the use of State repression when fascistic elements come to power, as well as the unleashing of their own fascist thugs as vigilante groups against the targeted minority, and against thinkers, intellectuals, political opponents and independent academics.

India conforms entirely to this pattern. There is however an additional element associated with the rise of fascistic groups to political power. Within monopoly capital it is

a newly emerging element, the “new monopoly bourgeoisie”, that acquires a particularly close relationship with the fascistic groups. Daniel Guerin, the well-known French anarcho-Marxist, had argued in his book *Fascism and Big Business*, that in Germany the newly-emerging monopoly capitalists in spheres like steel, producer goods, armaments and munitions had provided particularly solid backing to the Nazis in the 1930s, compared to the older monopoly capitalists engaged in spheres like textiles and consumer goods. To say this is not to suggest that the latter group did not support the Nazis; in fact Michael Kalecki the well-known economist talks of the Nazi regime as a partnership between fascist upstarts and big business without drawing any distinctions within the latter. It is a fact however that the new monopoly groups provide much more pro-active, much more aggressive support to the fascistic elements. Likewise in Japan, it was the emerging new group of monopoly capitalists, the Shinko Zaibatsu firms such as Nissan and Mori, that was far more aggressive in supporting the Japanese military-fascistic regime in the 1930s than the old Zaibatsu consisting of houses like Mitsui,

Mitsubishi and Sumitomo who had earlier been in the forefront of Japanese industrialisation. Again it is not a question of the old monopoly houses not supporting the fascistic regime; they obviously did (Mitsubishi after all was involved in ship-building). And this support was the reason why the post-war American occupation regime in Japan under General Douglas MacArthur also disbanded the old zaibatsu houses (it is another matter that they resurfaced in a different guise subsequently). But it was the new monopoly houses whose support for the military-fascistic regime was total, absolute and far more aggressive.

Here again India conforms entirely to this pattern. The new monopoly houses like the Adanis and the Ambanis have been far more pro-active in their support for the Modi regime, and have in turn benefitted immensely from such support, compared to the old and established monopoly houses, though the latter have not been in anyway reluctant to extend their support, with the head of the Tatas even visiting the RSS headquarters in Nagpur to underscore that house's proximity to the Hindutva regime.

The Modi government's close nexus with the new monopoly elements in particular and with monopoly capital in general has often been described as “crony capitalism”. This description however un-

derstates the closeness of the nexus between the fascistic elements in power and monopoly capital, especially new monopoly capital. It misses the specific, sui generis nature of this relationship that is better described as a corporate-Hindutva alliance. It amounts to using a blanket term that is applicable to all of modern capitalism to the specific situation of ascendancy of fascistic elements, and thereby misses its specificity.

In fact all capitalism is crony capitalism in a certain sense: there are certain “rules of the game” that have to be followed, but within those rules discretion is exercised in favour of “cronies”. For instance, for getting a contract, an applicant must fulfil certain minimum criteria, but among all who fulfil these criteria those who have the right “connections” or have the right public school education, or the right “background”, get the contract. The award of contracts under capitalism in other words is never entirely blind; but this lack of blindness, this systematic practice of favouritism, occurs within a certain set of “rules of the game”.

Under monopoly capitalism of course this relationship between monopoly capitalists and the state becomes far closer. Rudolf Hilferding in his opus *Das Finanzkapital* had talked of a “personal union” between banks and industrial capital and the formation on this basis of a “financial oligarchy”, and had suggested a similar “personal union” between the “financial oligarchy” and

the State. Executives of multinational corporations are appointed to senior State positions; and likewise senior State personnel shift smoothly to multinational corporations in senior executive positions. State policy thereby gets tailored to take care of the interests of monopoly capitalists. All this however still occurs within certain “rules of the game” which continue to be maintained, no matter how tilted in favour of the monopoly capitalists.

Even when the CIA staged a coup in Guatemala to topple Jacobo Arbenz whose land reforms had hurt the United Fruit Company of the US, or when the CIA and MI-6 staged a coup against Premier Mossadegh of Iran because he nationalised the oil industry, thereby displacing the British oil company, Anglo-Iranian, from the pre-eminent position it had occupied till then, the aggressive States were acting in defence of the interests of particular monopoly capitalists; but there was no disowning of the “rules of the game” and no owning that a coup had been staged to defend particular monopoly interests. In fact, to this day the British government formally denies having anything to do with the coup that toppled Mossadegh and brought the Shah of Iran to power.

The emergence of fascistic elements to power however changes all this. It entails a fundamental shift, namely a jettisoning of the “rules of the game”. This is clearly evident in the Indian case. When the prime minister asked the French govern-

ment to accept a newly created firm by Anil Ambani as the local manufacturer of the Rafael aircraft, there was no question of any global tender, and no question of satisfying any minimum criteria. In fact even the public sector manufacturer was by-passed, for which no explanation was ever offered. Likewise when, despite the Hindenburg revelations, no inquiry is ordered into the affairs of the Adani group, what people have is an abrogation of the “rules of the game”. It is reported that the BJP government is planning to select some firms and build them up to be “winners” in competition with other countries’ firms, which is indicative of a very close nexus between monopoly capital, especially new monopoly capital, and the State. There will be no “rules of the game” that will be followed in picking these potential “winners”; it will simply entail State help for building up the empires of monopoly capitalists with whom the Hindutva elements have entered into an alliance.

On the other side, the new monopoly elements reciprocate by ensuring that the Hindutva government gets full media support. It is hardly surprising that the remaining stray TV channel that had been somewhat independent of the government is bought up by the Adanis so that the process of garnering unanimous media support for the corporate-Hindutva alliance is completed. □□

(Courtesy: The author's blog at networkideas.org)

REVISITING UROJAHAAJ

Can the ‘Lower-Class’ Dream?

Swapnanil Mukherjee

Satyaki Dasgupta

MANY FILMS TALK ABOUT the deprivation of the material needs of the lower-class people but Urojahaaj under-

lines how the state and the society play an active role in the demolition of the dreams of the lower-class. In this 2018 film, director Buddhadeb

Dasgupta explores some important philosophical aspects of lower-class people’s lives like dreams, ambitions, and desire to live. Urojahaaj does not just want to show the material domination of higher-class people over the lower ones, but also how rich people dominate the poor philosophically.

The protagonist Bacchu is a

mechanic by profession. He finds an old war plane in the forest which triggers his desire to fly in the sky. Although he is a car mechanic, he dreams of flying the aircraft along with his family. To this end, he decorates it with his art, and asks his co-workers for help with this unrealistic task. While he is working on the aircraft, he fights with his insecurities. Dasgupta takes the help of the concept of spirits to portray them. Bacchu's doubts, pain, and suffering were projected through the stories of those spirits. The problems related to some fundamental desires of humans—love, hunger, and sex—were explored in this magic realistic sequence. The conversation Bacchu had with those spirits reminded him of the necessity of staying alive and intensified his zeal to survive and keep dreaming.

Eventually, Bacchu becomes desperate to fly the plane. But the

society does not see this ambition as normal, and felt the need to squash this dream. The educated Babus of Kolkata ridicules Bacchu for his desire to fly an aircraft. He is pushed around and humiliated when he went to Kolkata to look for a solution. When this does not deter him, the police intervene and take him away. He is suspected of being a spy because he was claiming Government's property. Bacchu believes that the aircraft belongs to him because he discovered it and put a lot of effort to resurrect the plane. This altercation causes the police to physically assault Bacchu and eventually arrest him. The man who had ambitions to fly is cooped into a small police van and taken away.

Dasgupta, probably the last auteur of Bengali films, dabbles with magic realism in his later films. The political undertones were still strong

and nuanced. The film directly links with the social and economic power structure of the society where in one-part internal contradictions were projected and in the other part external contradictions were explored. Both of these link to the larger political theme of the film. The upper class exercises its power over the lower class not only through material oppression but also by controlling the ambitions of the lower class. This control over the lower classes' dream is done implicitly by the babus and urban upper middle class and explicitly by the state through the police. There is a particular perception of lower-class people: how they should behave, how they should dress, and how big they should dream. Any time there is any deviation from this manufactured perception, the consequence can be disastrous for the lower class.

□□□

INTERVIEW

Despair among Chakmas in CHT

Rani Yan Yan

[Since the formation of Bangladesh as a nation in 1971, the indigenous communities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in southwestern Bangladesh have suffered from a policy of assimilation at the hands of the national government.

Armed conflict raged in the late 1970s and 1980s until an accord was signed between the indigenous political party and the government of Bangladesh almost 26 years ago in 1997. Indigenous peoples of the CHT claim that fundamental issues such as indigenous identity, land rights and demilitarisation are yet to be resolved as the government has failed to fully implement the Accord.

Rani Yan Yan is the Queen of the Chakma Indigenous peoples and the 'Chakma Circle' which is one of the indigenous governance bodies in the CHT; and an adviser to Raja Devasish Roy, the King and the Chief of the Chakma people and the Chakma Circle. She spoke with Melbourne Asia Review's managing editor Cathy Harper. Excerpts:]

Q. Would you paint a picture of what the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the indigenous communities there are like?

A. Chittagong Hill Tracts is the only hilly region in Bangladesh. The rest of the country is quite flat except for some small areas in the northeast and central north of the country. There are 11 indigenous

communities who have been living there for centuries which all have distinct cultures and languages which are very different from each other and also different from Bengali language and culture. They have learned to live with nature. We have a cultivation system which is unique. It is completely nature-based and does

not need irrigation or ploughing because we believe that one should not disturb the soil. There is a lot of nature-based indigenous knowledge which has not been documented that many scientific scholars now think has a scientific value. This is the knowledge that we have used to survive for so long. But in the modern state of Bangladesh this 'shifting cultivation' [jhoom] is regarded as something that is not good for the environment and there have been efforts to discourage our people to practise it and efforts to ban it, which would mean that our people in the rural remote areas would have little means to sustain themselves.

Q. Which community are you from?

A. My mother is from the Marma community, one of the 11 communities in the CHT. My father is not from the CHT—he is from the Rakhine community, an indig-

enous community in the plain land. In Bangladesh we have two broad sets: indigenous communities in the plain land and in the CHT. My parents were the first ones from their respective families who ventured out of their villages and found occupation in the capital city. They wanted to provide me and my siblings with better education and job opportunities, which were scarce in the CHT.

I grew up in the capital city Dhaka and went to one of the best schools in the country. I didn't have many indigenous friends because 30 years ago there were not many indigenous families living in the big cities. During my school years, I grew up with my Bengali friends and never thought of myself as someone different. True, I looked different and I could speak in a different language. But outside of home I spoke in Bangla, our national language. My school was a Catholic missionary school and I never felt any discrimination there. There were Muslim, Christian, Hindu and Buddhist children and we were treated the same irrespective of our religion or racial background. It was only when I completed my school and college education and got myself admitted to the University that I realised that the reality was quite different and harsh for people from different ethnicities than the reality I had always known in my earlier years. Faced with discriminatory behaviours and derogatory comments, the search for my roots and belonging began.

- Q.** What is the status of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the area's relationship with the rest of Bangladesh?
- A.** In 1971 Bangladesh became an independent nation from Pakistan and when the Constitution was being formed a delegation from

Chittagong Hill Tracts led by the lone MP from the CHT, Manabendra Narayan Larma, demanded that the Constitution include regional autonomy for Chittagong Hill Tracts with an imposition of a ban on the influx of non-tribal people in the CHT, as it had been the case under British colonial rule. The British colonial government did curb our independence, but gave CHT self-autonomous status in the CHT Regulation of 1900, commonly known as the CHT Manual. The CHT was declared an excluded area, which was eroded during the Pakistan era through different law enactments and amendments. MN Larma recognised that in a newly independent state, without such safeguards in place, the indigenous peoples of CHT will be further marginalised. But his demands were met with racial remarks and threats from the 'Father of the Nation' Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who said the indigenous peoples should become Bengalis and threatened to turn indigenous populations into minorities by sending Bengalis into the CHT. In response, MN Larma stood at the parliament stating 'I am a Chakma not a Bengali... They (Indigenous peoples from the CHT) can never become Bengali' and walked out of the parliament.

Eventually, the 1972 Constitution proclaimed Bangladesh as a unitary state with no pluralist systems or special status for the CHT. The Constitution stated that Bengali would be the national language, despite the existence of at least 54 indigenous languages in Bangladesh, which it did not recognise. Also, citizens of Bangladesh would be recognised as Bengali, which was a clear imposition of Bengali identity on

FRONTIER

44, Balam Dey Street, Kolkata-700006

Phone: (033) 2530-0065

Mail: frontierweekly@yahoo.co.in

frontierweekly@hotmail.com

Site: www.frontierweekly.com

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

India [Annual] Rs. 500

Frontier Associate [Annual] Rs. 1500

Life Subscription [Inland] Rs. 5000+

Make payment by Cheque/Draft
in favour of FRONTIER or
GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.

or
FRONTIER [GERMINAL
PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.]

MO should be addressed to Frontier
Please add Rs. 50/- to inland outstation
cheques towards bank charges, all
remittances to FRONTIER

**Payment could be made directly to
our bank accounts as given below.**

**Check the bank details before
transferring money. Also inform us
through e-mail after sending money.**

Beneficiary Name:

GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.

Bank Name: CENTRAL BANK OF INDIA

Address: 8, Lenin Sarani, Kol-700013

Branch: Esplanade Branch

Current Account Number: 3116713216

IFSC Code: CBIN0280098

Swift Code: CBININBBCAL

OR

GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.

Bank Name: PUNJAB NATIONAL BANK

Address : 223, C. R. Avenue, Kolkata-6

Branch: Jorasanko Branch

Current Account Number: 0085050001319

IFSC Code: PUNB0008020

Branch Code : 0008020

Swift Code: UTBIINBB0BC

OR

(GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD)

Bank Name: PUNJAB NATIONAL BANK

Address : 223, C. R. Avenue, Kolkata-6

Branch: Jorasanko Branch

Current Account Number: 0085050001378

IFSC Code: PUNB0008020

Branch Code : 0008020

Swift Code: UTBIINBB0BC

*For MO, Regd. Post and Speed Post
mailing address should be written in the
following fashion :

To

FRONTIER

C/o Durbar Mahila Samanwya Committee

44, Balam Dey Street, Kolkata-700006

West Bengal

Contact Number : 8240016324

indigenous peoples. In the same year, MN Larma formed a political party—the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS)—and later an armed wing called Shanti Bahini was formed. As MN Larma's demands were seen as a secessionist movement, CHT underwent militarisation in early 1972, especially following the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975. The leadership of indigenous peoples lost faith in the political process and an armed defence was initiated by the PCJSS.

It was a big challenge for the military to subdue indigenous peoples. You can't just go in with tanks and mortars in the hilly inaccessible terrain which indigenous peoples know so well and had upper hand in a guerrilla war. So one of the strategies the military employed was to make us minorities in our own land by demographic engineering, by bringing in and settling large numbers of destitute Bengali people from the plains. These settlers were both used as human shields and as weapons to carry out atrocities against the indigenous peoples of CHT by the military. Many atrocities were committed against indigenous peoples such

as burning villages and killing and torturing innocent civilians, as well as sexual violence against indigenous women and girls. Some of these incidents were well-documented but some were not.

This low intensity armed conflict went on until 1997 when the CHT Accord was signed between PCJSS and the ruling Awami League government led by the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. She even received UNESCO Peace Prize for ending the decades long conflict. However, under her rule and rule of successive governments up until today, militarisation has continued in the CHT and marginalisation of the indigenous peoples has continued.

Extra judicial killings, imprisonment and torture of civilians under the custody of security forces, trumped up charges against indigenous political leaders, intimidation and harassment of those involved in the Indigenous People Human Rights Defenders Network and violence against indigenous women and girls are still a reality. We have had several incidents of mass communal attack on indigenous peoples backed by security forces, after signing of the Accord. None of the instigators and perpetrators of these crimes have yet been brought to justice.

Q. Was what the military did genocide?

A. There is a definition of genocide in the United Nations convention on genocide, but also there is debate regarding what constitutes genocide and when the term can be applied. It's difficult to ascertain whether the atrocities carried out by the military and the settlers against indigenous peoples of the CHT constitute genocide, but without a doubt what went on is an

ethnocide. Having said that, Bangladesh has been trying to have atrocities committed by the Pakistani army against civilians during the liberation war as genocide. If genocide is distinguishable from other crimes of humanity by the motivation behind it and it is not measured by the number of deaths, then the Pakistani army committed genocide against Bangladeshi people and so too the military of Bangladesh against indigenous peoples of the CHT.

Q. Can you tell me a bit more about the continued dispossession of land?

A. It has been 25 years since the Accord was signed, but the major provisions have not yet been fully implemented. The government continuously claims that 70-80 percent of the Accord has been implemented, but our position is while some of the provisions have been implemented, the major ones haven't been, such as the land disputes resolution, demilitarisation of the CHT and rehabilitation of the internally displaced persons. The main issue of contestation is our land rights. When we refer to land rights we don't just mean individual land rights, we want our collective land rights too.

Most of our land was dispossessed in the pre-Accord era. Our land was allocated to hundreds of thousands of settler Bengalis that I have mentioned earlier. Thousands of acres of our land was leased to companies and businesses owned and operated by non-residents. The military acquired our land to build and expand cantonments, firing ranges, army camps and other security facilities.

In the post-Accord times, more and more land is being dispossessed in the name of develop-

For Frontier Contact

D.K. AGENCIES (P) LTD.

Booksellers, Publishers & Subscription
Agents since 1968

CIN: U74899DL1983PTC017169

"DK" is a registered trademark

Regd. off: A/15-17, D.K. Avenue,

Mohan Garden, Najafgarh Road,

New Delhi-110059. INDIA

Metro Station: Nawada (Blue Line)

Web: <http://www.dkagencies.com>

Ph: (011) 25357104, 25357105

Fax: (+91-11) 25357103

ment and tourism. Roads have been constructed without the consent of the residents or paying any compensation to the owners of the land, several tourist resorts and spots have been built by the military after forcibly or illegally acquiring indigenous land dislocating many adjacent villages in those areas.

Q. What is the focus of your work on the rights of indigenous communities?

A. We have our own indigenous traditional governance system in the

CHT consisting of three administrative boundaries which are called 'Circles'. As the advisor of one of those Circles, my duties involve advising the Chief of the Circle and traditional leaders regarding any political or development issues that need to be addressed, strategising courses of action and facilitating capacity enhancement of our traditional leaders.

In my capacity as an Indigenous peoples' human rights defender, my work involves bringing national and international attention

to rights violation cases, including violence against women; raising awareness on indigenous rights, non-violent movement building, enhancing the capacity of the youth human rights defenders, alliance and network-building between local, and national and international rights and development organisations, among others. I strongly advocate for indigenous peoples right to self-determination. Nothing about us, without us.

□□□

'DIRTY WAR IN KASHMIR'

Silencing a Sane Voice

Joydip Ghosal

A VOICE HAD BEEN SILENCED in Kashmir valley on June 14, 2018. Sujaat Bukhari, according to Mohammed Yusuf Tarigami, MLA Kulgam, was a powerful voice. He aptly described his death as a 'huge loss to democratic ethos. This is a grave attack not only on press freedom but also an assault on voices of sanity and reason." He was the editor of *Rising Kashmir*. He also acted as correspondent of *The Hindu*. He was the initiator of Urdu daily *Buland Kashmir* and Urdu weekly *Kashmir Parcham*. He also started Kashmiri language paper *Sangarmal*. He was the president of a literary forum *Abadi Markaz Kamraz*.

Before he was killed he documented for the *Frontline* magazine his well-researched articles where he delved deeper into the complexities of multi-layered Kashmir. He cautiously tried to peel them off to unearth the stark facts laced with bitter truths both for the ruling dispensation and opposition. The book *The 'Dirty War in Kashmir'*, *Frontline Reports* (Published by *Leftword*) reflected on Hindutwabadi bigots,

lopsided policies of the state, impunity enjoyed by law enforcing agencies, rise of radical insurgencies, surging protest against the atrocities. This book explains the true nature of the problem in the valley of death and the multifaceted aspects of militancy and resistance.

His role as a journalist working in a region of multiple-conflicts where the population got alienated from state forced readers to ponder over the Kashmir issue from a newer angle. Through the foreword by Vijaya Sankar it is known that Sujaat's association with *Frontline* began when he started working as *Hindu's Kashmir correspondent* between September 1, 1997, and March 31, 2012. John Cherian, magazine's world affairs editor pointed out that the association cemented since 2013. After the hanging of Afzal Guru on 9th February, 2013 he wrote an incisive piece. Despite his serious involvement in many peace processes he maintained objectivity in these articles of the book *Dirty War*. He stressed that rest of India tries to comprehend the Kashmir issue in a holistic perspective. (Courtesy: RK

Radhakrishnan). That is why *Kashmir Initiative Group* was born which traversed across India and raised and debated the Kashmir question and urged people to participate in the debate. His learning came from deep understanding of valley's troubles. Dilrukshi Handunnetti, a lawyer and Sri Lanka - based journalist said that Sujaat raised his voice against information curfew. His *Rising Kashmir* had been shut down at least on three occasions. He always reported from perilous places which were 'political playground for two countries.' According to Radhakrishnan valley's journalists were like chroniclers of death. Sujaat was deeply concerned about that.

In the article titled *Simmering Valley* Sujaat delineated in details his apprehensions regarding comments of Chidambaram when he said that India was on the brink of losing Kashmir. He said such voices were minority. When the whole Kashmir promulgated an emphatic no to a bye-election in 2017 the reality actually dawned on people. He tried to delve deeper into the ground realities of Kashmir when new battle lines were drawn in Kashmir after 2016. The anger against the system had reached a crescendo. He brought forth the reasons why people put up resistance to the presence of security

forces during anti-militancy operations. In the book he clearly stated that the space for stone-pelters broadened because a big chasm existed as there was absence of meaningful political engagement. He lambasted at the role of jingoistic media when he said that the war portrayed on the media causing more damage. In one of the article he drew stark distinction between the militancy of South and North Kashmir. In South Kashmir militants used social media as was evident in the case of Burhan Wani. But in North Kashmir the militants stayed away from using social media.

With his skilful analysis in the essay he tried to bring forth the reasons why the attack on Amarnath jatra was a chilling reminder on the grim security situation in the Kashmir valley. The attack was projected as instance of communal violence but the ground reality was that it was part of larger security issue. On the other hand a redeeming aspect was the outright disapproval of this act of dastard nature. Cutting across religious divide all sections came

together to castigate the attack in unequivocal terms. Sujaat said they vehemently criticised that act because that went against 'Kashmiri ethos.' According to him the unity displayed by people of various hues in condemning the violence was silver lining in the gloominess and pensive dark atmosphere that enveloped the valley. Before the abrogation of article 370 and 35 A he studied seriously the implications and serious ramifications if these articles were tinkered with. He also deftly described the fate of various enquiries which were lost in the maze of oblivion.

As he was votary of intrepid and objective journalism Sujaat always stood for resolution of Kashmir imbroglio. He was personally involved in track II dialogue. During the PDP – BJP alliance he commented that it was a ruse to woo the voters on the part of BJP. The valley might present a semblance of normalcy at that time. But with his journalistic acumen and foresightedness he was able to point out the simmering rage laced with discontent and utter de-

pendency. In this book he also tried to understand the role of interlocutors when Dineshwar Sharma was appointed. He expressed his apprehension because it did not hold much promise for breaking the political deadlock. He expressed his concern because many interlocutors sounded out of touch with the ground reality. The space had been squeezed to such an extent that any individual who carried the baggage of bygone days might not be in a position to find fine balance. When the ruling dispensation was anointed in power every effort had been made to make Kashmir look like a security problem which can be solved by applying military might. Although militancy is a hard reality, the reasons for its political existence cannot be ruled out. Persistent denial of that reality had precipitated the inclination of the young ones to militancy.

The editor of this book aptly called that these pieces offer insights into the means to bring about lasting peace and democracy in the otherwise restive valley. □□□

REMEMBERING PAUL ROBESON

A Mascot of People's Liberation

Harsh Thakor

APRIL 9, 2023 MARKED THE 125th anniversary of the birth of Paul Robeson, one of the outstanding Revolutionary or Marxist personalities of the 20th century. He was not only an outstanding US scholar, athlete, lawyer, actor and singer but, most importantly, a relentless battler for the rights of all who championed the spirit of liberation, for his own people and for the peoples of the world. Very few artists transcended barriers of revolutionary courage to confront fascism, as Robeson, whose creative contribution among Black artists is almost unparalleled.

Robeson became the first African American to play William Shakespeare's Othello, with Uta Hagen as Desdemona, in the Theatre Guild production in New York in 1943. Robeson said, "What provoked Othello was the destruction of himself as a human being, of his human dignity. I related that dignity to my whole people in what Othello calls 'his honour, his dignity.'"

When he first visited the Soviet Union., Robeson was greatly impressed with Russia at that time as he discovered no colour bar there. He eulogised the political system of the

Soviet Union stating he never witnessed such scale of egalitarianism, his lifetime.. He went to Spain and was out among the Loyalist fighting men and played his part in sharpening the anti-fascist struggle by giving concerts."

Robeson was a committed anti-fascist, travelling to Spain during the Civil War to show solidarity with the anti-Franco resistance. He quickly found good company with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade composed of travellers from around the world who flocked to the region to fight fascism. This experience left him "filled with admiration and love" for this coalition of anti-fascists hailing dozens of countries around the world. When pressed by the HUAC on his possible ties to communists, he was

resolute in his position: “wherever I have been in the world, Scandinavia, England, and many places, the first to die in the struggle against Fascism were the Communists and I laid many wreaths upon graves of Communists.”

Paul was an internationalist and a prominent figure in the working-class movement singing wherever workers were fighting for their rights.

Robeson analysed integral relationship between Black liberation in the United States and movements for liberation in Africa. His polemics on racism in the world-system was illustrated when he asked “can we oppose white supremacy in South Carolina and not oppose the same system in South Africa?” He followed up with the assertion that “the colonial peoples—the coloured peopled of the world—were going to be free and equal no matter whose ‘best interests’ obstruct them.” Robeson offered a blistering critique of the ideological underpinnings of colonial-capitalism, whereby politicians endorsed their quest for global hegemony under the banner of it being in the ‘best interest’ to ‘take it slow’ in the march towards Black liberation.

After World War II the anti-communist witch hunt began that targeted Robeson and many others. To this persecution he responded, “Nobody is scaring me.” Quoting his father he said, “Never compromise your principles no matter what, never take low.”

A month after Joseph Stalin died in 1953 Robeson wrote a letter entitled To You Beloved Comrade.

He wrote, “Colonial peoples today look to the Soviet Socialist Republics. They see how under the great Stalin millions like themselves have found a new life. They see formerly semi-colonial Eastern European nations building new People’s Democracies, based upon the people’s power with the people shaping their own destinies. So much of this progress stems from the magnificent leadership, theoretical and practical, given by their friend Joseph Stalin.

Chinese adoration for Robeson “derives most of all from his role in globalising the future national anthem of the People’s Republic of China.” Introduced to it in November 1940, for Robeson, its lyrics “expressed the determination of the world’s oppressed, in their struggle for liberation.”

Robeson’s connections to the struggles and aspirations of the Chinese people can be traced to at least 1935, when he met in London with Mei Lanfang, considered the father of modern Peking Opera, who was returning from three weeks of successful appearances in the Soviet Union.

On October 1 1949, when Chairman Mao proclaimed the founding of the People’s Republic of China, Robeson sang the national anthem on the streets of Harlem and cabled his congratulations to the Chinese leader.

Despite being a victim of grave targeting, he unflinchingly stood firm when Chinese forces entered the Korean War. Mutual support between the People’s Republic of China and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea would, he insisted, be the “great truth” in their shared journey to freedom.

Many important personalities in India expressed their admiration with Robeson. Bhupen Hazarika who had based his famous songs ‘Bistirna Parore’ and ‘Ganga Behti Ho Kyun’ on Old Man River. The mathematician and historian D D Kosambi “revered Paul Robeson’s songs”. The Telegu writer Chalam once wrote that his daughter compared Sri Sri’s writing with Robeson’s music.

It was Bengal,. Hemanga Biswas, a member of Indian People’s Theatre Association, himself remembered for imbibing folk traditions and fighting for peace, would perform the song “Negro Bhai Amar Paul Robeson” along with his troupe.

This song, composed and written by Kamal Sarkar, was based on a translation by Subhash Mukhopadhyaya of Nazim Hikmet’s poem written in 1949 to his “Negro Brother” Paul Robeson. “They don’t let us sing our songs” for “they are afraid” is the call of both the original poem and the song.

Very hard to visualise a Robeson to re-emerge in today’s world, with waves of globalisation and neo-fascism blowing at their strongest, and hardly any Marxist alternative. □□□

MODI’S GLOBAL FANDOM

Democracy Abroad, Autocracy at Home

Arjun Appadurai

IN JUNE, MODI WAS HOSTED on a state visit to the US by the Bidens, and treated as some combination of Messiah, Pope and Rockstar. There was already evidence of his global Rockstar status when

he visited Australia, Papua New Guinea and Japan for the Quad meeting in Hiroshima, where he was also the object of remarkably effusive acknowledgements by many other world leaders. In the US, Modi

received 15 standing ovations during his speech to the two houses of the US Congress, was feted by the great CEOs of the US, including Indra Nooyi, Sundar Pichai and Satya Nadella, among other ‘business jewels’ in the US firmament.

The African-American singer, Mary Millben, who sang the Indian national anthem for Modi, touched his feet, in a very odd and embar-

raising manner. A few sharp questions from journalists and a letter of caution about Modi's human rights record from 75 Democratic members of Congress to Biden were marginalised both by the media and by the political elite.

Barack Obama made his own cautionary remarks about Modi's relationship to Indian minorities, and for this he was roundly lambasted. On his way back to India, Modi made the brilliant choice of stopping in Egypt, where he was greeted with great fanfare. These photo-ops made a mockery of the lives of India's 200 million Muslims, whose precarity, fear and retreat in every part of India has been widely reported. It was the crowning display of Modi's ability to trump his Indian record with his global triumphs. This worldwide adulation deserves some careful thought.

Some causes for Modi's global star status are obvious. The first is the wish in the US, and in many other countries that are either directly or indirectly part of the American order of things, to contain, discredit and offset China's growing power in Asia and the world. Many commentators have attributed Biden's refusal to say a word about human rights issues in India during Modi's visit to the undeclared cold war between the US and China.

The most important factor is economic interests: the US as well as many other nations around the world eye Indian markets, defence industries, and foreign investment openness with great interest. Modi has been striking big deals on all his global pitstops and signaling India's warm welcome to global corporate overlords everywhere.

With the possible exception of President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine, no other leader has received such amazing bilateral acclaim in the US, or in other countries that vociferously oppose Russia's

military action in Ukraine. Not even Modi's careful refusal to openly condemn Vladimir Putin has tarnished his welcome in the US. And Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar's recent and curt dismissal of the feelers to India from the US about joining NATO could not take the bloom off Modi's rose.

Modi's global popularity derives from the fact that he meets the need for a charismatic leader in countries who are totally divided about their own leaders, have large oppositions to the incumbent leader or live in utter fear of the leader in power.

Middle Eastern countries are largely trapped between military and religious dictatorships and can hardly play the democracy card. Likewise, the countries of the African subcontinent are wracked by civil war, autocracies and weak civic organisations. The era of the Mandelas, the Nikrumahs and the Kenyattas seems now a dim memory.

Modi appears to be a saviour born in India but destined to save the world for democracy. In a possible Asian century, no other Asian leader can claim the credit for India's combination of military and economic clout, strategic location and its carefully managed appearance of being a full-blooded 'democracy'.

The truth is that Modi has tried to defang the Indian judiciary, to turn the bulk of the media into his lapdogs, and to make Parliament his version of an imperial court and tried to turn the once independent bureaucracy into his servants. Still, India remains framed in the Gandhian halo of homegrown democracy, in the Nehruvian ethos of playing on the global stage, with its tantalising promise of a billion customers waiting for the global market to come their way at a faster pace than before. Modi exemplifies democracy abroad while crushing

democratic dissent with iron hands at home.

The Farmers Movement of 2021-'22 paralysed the Modi regime and forced it to reverse several aggressive neo-liberal agricultural policies..

Modi's massive successes in overseas deals, hugs and red carpets reflects two deep forces, apart from those of global realpolitik. The first is that Modi has become the fantasy yardstick for charismatic popular leadership in many countries, even if he has another country's passport. The second is that Modi massages this global cult status because of its potential to become the critical counterweight to help him, and his party, retain power in the face of many signs of slippage, reversal and revolt at home.

Still, why is Modi's global fandom immune to the widely available information about his crony capitalism, his Hindutva dog whistle and his deep disdain for dissidence? One part of the reason is the powerful default image of India as a non-violent, plural and modernising democracy.

The second is a less-noticed factor. It is the thirst for a touch of glamour in the leadership of today's big powers. Almost without exception, these are men in gray flannel suits, party apparatchiks and career politicians, whose messages seek to be more colourful than their images.

The open question is whether Modi can convert his global I-pop stardom into the politics of Manipur, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and others where the BJP flame is flickering, and 2024 feels awfully nearby. □□□

[Arjun Appadurai is Emeritus Professor of Media, Culture and Communication at New York University. He lives in Berlin.]

**Readers are requested to note the changed address (new) of our website
www.frontierweekly.com**

LETTERS

Samar Bagchi

Dr Samar Bagchi, a science educator, environmentalist and people's rights activist passed away on July 30, 2023. He began his career at the Birla Industrial & Technological Museum in Kolkata, where he served as the esteemed director until 1990. He had major contributions to the fields of People's Science and Environmental Conservation. He was associated with the National Alliance of People's Movements during the 1980s. His death leaves behind an irreparable void in the field of people's science movement.

**MASUM, Hooghly, WB
Rajasthan Platform
Based Gig Workers Act**

After the passage of the historic Rajasthan Minimum Guaranteed Income Law on 22nd July 2023, the Rajasthan Assembly has passed the Rajasthan Platform Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare Act), 2023. In yet another series of firsts, this has become the first State in the country to pass a legislation ensuring social security of platform-based gig workers in the State. The key provisions of the Act include:

1. Setting up of a tripartite board with the representation of aggregators, worker organizations and Government tasked with the powers to register platform-based gig workers in the State, notify and administer social security schemes for them and monitor the implementation of the Act.
2. Introduction of a dedicated welfare cess fee on each bill generated by the aggregator to the customer. The fee collected from individual transactions will be credited to a social security fund which shall be used towards financing schemes meant for the welfare of platform-based gig workers.
3. Automatic registration of all platform-based gig workers operating in the state as soon as they 'onboard' aggregator platforms, irrespective of the duration of their association with the platform.
4. Presence of a centralized tracking

and management system that shall function as a common portal for all financial transactions taking place on the aggregator's platform. The breakdown of individual bills into its constituent parts i.e. fare charged/ service costs for the customer, payment made to the platform worker, cess fee deducted etc will be reflected in the centralised tracking and management system at the transaction level.

5. Making Department of Labour and the Tripartite Board responsible for registering, acknowledging and redressing grievances faced by platform based gig workers in a time bound manner.

The SR Abhiyan which has been involved with the advocacy and drafting of the Bill welcomes this critical breakthrough that ensures the rights of a class of extremely vulnerable workers in present times.

Nikhil Dey

Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS)
Village Devdungri, Post Barar, District
Rajsamand, Rajasthan-313341

Killing by BSF

In the night between 1st and 2nd August. Mithu Hoque, S/o Abdul Rahim, aged 35, a resident of Vill: Tutiya Kuthi, GP: Nayarhat, P.S. Sahebganj, Dinhat II block, was killed by BSF firing. He was killed by BSF personnel attached to 179 Bn BSF posted at Chongar Khata BOP in Mathabhanga I block, which comes under the jurisdiction of Mathabhanga PS, Cooch Behar. Through some primary investigation MASUM has come to know that the victim sustained three rounds of firing by the said BSF personnel. The BSF said that Hoque was associated with cross border smuggling.

The victim could have been apprehended by the BSF personnel and could have been brought to the court of law for his alleged involvement in the said crime. But, instead the BSF personnel involved took the brutal path of summary execution and creation of a fictitious story about self defence. When the Chief Minister of West Bengal is repeatedly condemning violence in the Indo-Bangladesh border area

and the prime minister of India is pledging to bring down border killings to zero, why does the Border Security Force involve in such act repeatedly? Has the BSF gone rogue? Does the State have no control over the actions of this agency? How are they repeatedly going against the words of the prime minister and adhering to their heinous "Shoot to kill" policy? The victim may have been involved with smuggling, but that doesn't mean he can be subjected to summary execution..

**Kirity Roy
Secretary, MASUM &
National Convenor (PACTI)
VB Suspends a Student**

A Dalit student of the Visva-Bharati, who was suspended recently for a semester on disciplinary grounds, said he would move the National Commission for Scheduled Castes against the order of the central university.

Somnath Sow, an SFI leader, has been at the forefront of demonstrations against Vice Chancellor Bidyut Chakraborty on different issues since the VC had taken over in 2018. The university had suspended the student for "violating" campus discipline in 2020 also.

Action was taken against him on July 27 ostensibly for his Facebook post on January 28 in which he had made some comments on the land ownership issue between Nobel laureate Amartya Sen and Visva-Bharati.

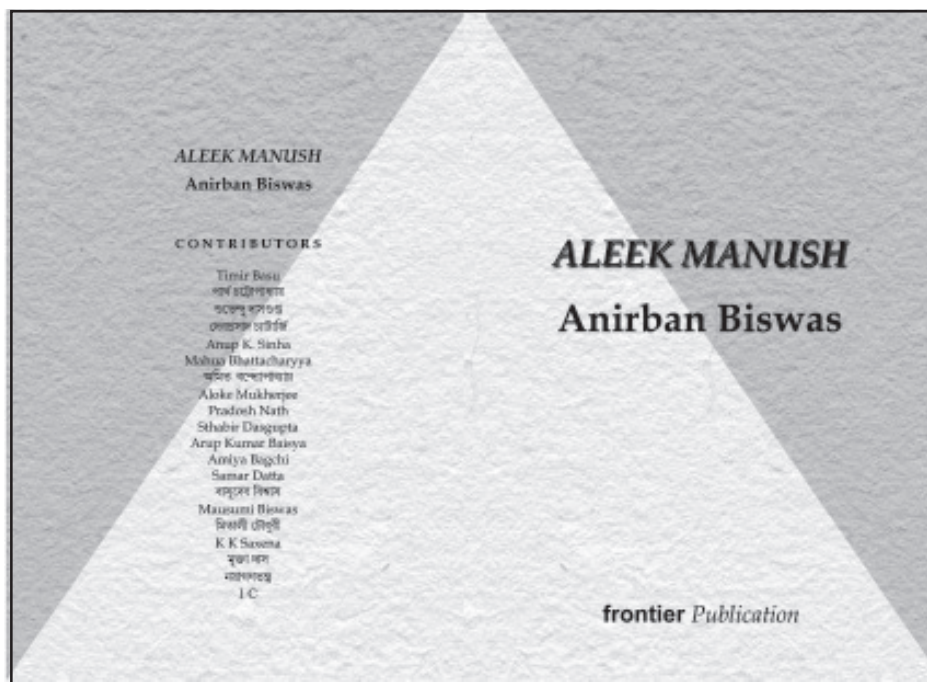
In the show-cause notice to Sow, the university had said that his Facebook post in support of the renowned economist was "full of false/misleading information, contrary to official records and official position of Visva-Bharati, aimed at denigrating, defaming and derogating Visva-Bharati as an institution and also its functionaries/officials and staff".

The central university in a statement said that Sow was suspended following recommendations of a students' disciplinary committee and the institute "is morally committed to carve out a course of correction for the deviant students and learners." Sow added he would also move the Calcutta High Court against the university's decision.

A Reader, Visva Bharati

A **frontier** Publication

Just Released



ALEEK MANUSH

Anirban Biswas

COMPILATION TEAM:

TIMIR BASU, ARUP SEN, NABINANDA SEN, TARUN BASU

CONTRIBUTORS:

TIMIR BASU, PARTHA CHATTOPADHYAY, SHUBHENDU DASGUPTA,
DEBAPROSAD CHATTERJEE, ANUP K. SINHA, MAHUA BHATTACHARYYA,
AMIT BANDYOPADHYAY, ALOKE MUKHERJEE, PRADOSH NATH, STHABIR
DASGUPTA, ARUP KUMAR BAISYA, AMIYA BAGCHI, SAMAR DATTA,
BASUDEB BISWAS, MAUSUMI BISWAS, MITALI CHOWDHURY, K K SAXENA,
MUKTA DAS, NAYAGANATANTRA, I C

Available at:

Frontier Office, Patiram Stall (College Street), Dhyانبindu
and other book stalls selling issues of frontier.

Contribution: INR 100