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Prosecuting Arundhati Roy

WHILE ADDRESSING THE G-7 GATHERING IN ITALY MODI pitched India as Global South's voice, 'bringing its priorities and concerns to the world'. The reality is completely otherwise. He has earned enormous notoriety in silencing democratic voice in his own country. He is a classic example of how an autocrat can present himself as a democrat. He sees his victory as the victory of the entire democratic world. Maybe, it is the joke of the year! As he was selling Indian brand of democracy abroad Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena sanctioned the prosecution of author-activist Arundhati Roy and Dr Sheikh Showkat Hussain, former professor at the Central University under section 45(1) of the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) in connection with a 2010 FIR over 'provocative speeches in public' at a New Delhi auditorium. But the very invocation of UAPA after 14 years is technically problematic as experts say in this case UAPA bypasses statute of limitations and 'top court stay on sedition law'. For one thing in 2010 P Chidambaram of Congress was Union Home minister. And Rahul Gandhi's Congress Party that is now spearheading anti-Modi crusade through their 'INDIA' bloc is silent about the Delhi Governor's action against Roy and Hussain.

For one thing Roy has been a vocal critic of Modi's authoritarianism for long while Mr Saxena is allegedly close to Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This is horrifying and a clear case of political persecution by the Government at the centre. Seven Stories Press, which publishes Roy's work, wrote on social media in response to the news: 'This kind of fascism is what Indians have voted against'. The UAPA allows the authorities to detain suspects for up to 180 days without any charges. It was made more draconian in 2019 by the Modi administration so that individuals could be classified as terrorists without necessarily being linked to a designated terror group. A total of 1,948 were arrested in 2019 after the change came into force, marking an uptick of almost 37 percent from the previous year. This is what they call the biggest showpiece of democracy. In truth India is the biggest prison house in the world--almost all jails and sub-jails are overcrowded with Undertrials." If by prosecuting Arundhati Roy under UAPA the BJP are trying to prove they're back, well, they're not. And they'll never be back the same way they were," said Mohua Moitra, member of parliament from opposition Trinamool Congress. Then CPI-M said the move was 'condemnable' and that prosecuting Roy for a speech

made 14 years ago 'defies logic except the fascist kind'. CPI leader D Raja said that the "timing is highly questionable" as courts were on vacation, as were lawyers." Kashmir-based parties—National Conference and People's Democratic Party also protested against applying UAPA to imprison Arundhati Roy.

Several authors and activists with international repute condemned the Delhi Governor's action and expressed solidarity with the 62-year-old Roy, who won the Booker Prize

in 1977 for her novel *The God of Small Things*.

Noted author Amitav Ghosh said: "The hounding of Arundhati Roy is absolutely unconscionable. She is a great writer and has a right to her opinion." There should be international outcry about this fascistic action of the Indian Government. The saffron brigade has been out to get her since the days she spoke about the Modi government's complicity in the 2002 Gujarat riots. Rumour was there for quite some

time that Arundhati Roy might be Modi's next political prisoner. It became true after his oath taking as prime minister for the third time.

Despite the set-back in the 2024 general elections Modi is unlikely to change his authoritarian style of governance because his coalition partners are too opportunist to oppose Modi's onslaught to curtail whatever remains of democratic space and silence voice of dissent. □

17-06-2024

COMMENT

Finally a Ceasefire?

THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY Council (UNSC) endorsed a United States-backed ceasefire resolution on June 10 in the latest diplomatic effort to end eight months of Israel's devastating military offensive in the Gaza Strip.

The resolution, which calls for a comprehensive three-phase ceasefire deal, was adopted by 14 members of the UNSC, with abstention from Russia.

US President Joe Biden unveiled the peace proposal on May 31. Before that, the Biden administration had faced criticism for blocking at least three UNSC resolutions to end the war that has killed more than 37,000 Palestinians and injured about 85,000.

The US abstained from the last UNSC resolution, which called for a truce, passed in March.

But hours after the vote at UNSC, Israel carried out deadly attacks across the Palestinian enclave, raising questions about whether the latest resolution will lead to a permanent ceasefire.

While Hamas welcomed the cease-fire resolution passed in UNSC, Israel seems determined to continue the war in Gaza.

Hamas leaders want a permanent end to the war, something that Israel has rejected, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insisting that Israel will only end the war once it "destroys" Hamas and frees the remaining captives.

Israel's representative to the UN, Reut Shapir Ben-Naftaly, said the war would not end until Hamas's capabilities were "dismantled", raising questions about whether Israel would honour the latest resolution. In truth neither Hamas nor Israel has formally embraced the peace plan.

Without such a commitment, the resolution would be "very problematic.. "Will Israelis agree to this and will they accept a permanent ceasefire?"

The resolution's text says Israel has accepted Biden's May 31 ceasefire proposal and "calls upon Hamas to also accept it".

But Israeli leaders have lambasted Biden's peace plan endorsed by the UN. Israeli website Ynetnews reported that the resolution's wording does not reflect the deal Israel agreed on, which involved Hamas no longer governing Gaza. The website, quoting an unnamed senior Israeli offi-

cial, said the resolution restricts Israeli freedom of action.

While voting one of the non-permanent member of UNSC Algeria said, "To us, Palestinian lives matter."

The Switzerland representative echoed the sentiment, bringing up the Palestinian lives lost during Israel's last major assault on Nuseirat. At least 274 Palestinians were killed in the Israeli raid on the refugee camp to free four captives. And Palestinians pleaded for an end to the war in Gaza. Maybe, Hamas hardliners are under pressure to make a deal though their supreme leader Sinwar thinks Palestinians are paying a 'small price' for liberation struggle.

"The catastrophic humanitarian situation is indescribable," the representative of Japan said.

The UK representative asserted the importance of a rapid increase in humanitarian aid.

Russia abstained saying the wording of the resolution lacked "clarity" and that Moscow was not kept "in the loop".

While the representative of China said the draft was "ambiguous" in some places, he voted in favour, voicing concern for the rampant deaths of Gaza's civilians.

He added that China will work towards bringing Israel and Palestine "back to the right track" of the two-state solution.

The international community, including Israel's main backer the US, support two independent states living side by side for Palestinians and Israelis. But Israel has continued to build Jewish-only settlements on Palestinian lands, which is the biggest obstacle to peace. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has boasted of stalling the Oslo Accords, which called for a freeze on settlements, considered illegal

under international laws.

The resolution urges Israel and Hamas to take the steps needed for the implementation of a "permanent ceasefire".

"The problem here is that the implementation of such a resolution depends on the agreement of Hamas and Israel. At the moment, none of them is saying they accept it fully".

13-06-2024

[Contributed]

NOTE

The March of the Far-Right

MC writes:

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT has shifted to the right. Far-right parties in the European Union won significant gains in parliamentary seats. Giorgia Meloni, the Italian Premier, more than doubled her party's seats in the assembly. Germany's extreme right party swept past Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democrats. Emmanuel Macron, the President of France, who called snap legislative elections, faced a humiliating defeat.

Sensing a threat from the far-right, the Christian Democrats shifted further to the right on migration and climate ahead of the elections—and were rewarded by remaining by far the biggest group in the 720-seat European Parliament and de facto brokers of the ever-expanding powers of the legislature.

The surge in populist parties across Europe will make it harder for the assembly to approve climate change and agriculture policy legislation for the next five years.

Marine Le Pen emerged as the star of the night. The National Rally party dominated the French polls to such an extent that Macron immediately dissolved the national parliament and called for new elections to

start later this month. It's a political risk since his party could suffer more losses, hobbling the rest of his presidential term that ends in 2027.

Le Pen, who seemed delighted to accept the challenge, said, 'We're ready to turn the country around, ready to defend the interests of the French, ready to put an end to mass immigration,' echoing far-right leaders in other countries, who were celebrating substantial wins.

In Germany, the EU's most populous nation, projections indicated that the AfD's scandals had not dissuaded voters. Its vote share increased from 11% in 2019 to 16.5%. In comparison, the combined result for the three parties in the German governing coalition barely topped 30 per cent.

Across the EU, two mainstream and pro-European groups—the Christian Democrats and the Socialists—remained dominant. The gains of the far-right came at the expense of the Greens, who were expected to lose about 20 seats and fall back to sixth position in the legislature. Macron's pro-business Renew group also lost significantly.

After considering the idea of working with a political group further right, Ursula von der Leyen

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offered to build a coalition with the Social Democrats, which mostly held its ground in the elections, and the pro-business Liberals.

'The Christian Democrats have 189 seats, up 13; the Social Democrats 135, down 4; the pro-business Renew group 83, down 19; The Greens slumped to 53, down 18.

Germany, a traditional stronghold for environmentalists, exemplified the humbling of the Greens, who were predicted to fall from 20% to 12%. With further losses expected in France and elsewhere, the Greens' defeat could impact the EU's climate change policies, which are the most progressive globally.

Populist far-right parties now lead governments in three nations—Hungary, Slovakia and Italy—and are part of ruling coalitions in others, including Sweden and Finland. □□□

For **Frontier Contact**

DHYANBINDU

COLLEGE SQUARE

INTERVIEW WITH CPI-ML GENERAL SECRETARY

It is a Verdict against Modi

[Naval Kishore Kumar and Rajan Kumar on behalf of Forward Press recently spoke with Dipankar Bhattacharya, General Secretary, CPI-ML, immediately after the 2024 poll results were out. Excerpts:]

Q. If the recently concluded Lok Sabha elections are seen from the Dalit-Bahujan and Leftist perspective, what is your primary reaction in this regard?

A. Certainly, the issues on which this Lok Sabha election was fought had the questions of the poor, farmers, labourers, Dalit-Bahujans at the centre. Being a constituent party of the India Alliance, we can say that we all fought this election together and the slogan of crossing four hundred that was being given, the people of the country have rejected it. If seen, in this election, the people have given their mandate against Narendra Modi. You see that in Uttar Pradesh, where Modi, Shah and Yogi were all involved, they have lost. Even in the common area Faizabad (Ayodhya), the BJP candidate lost to the Dalit community candidate of the SP. However, we accept that there have been some shortcomings on our part too, which were discussed yesterday when the alliance meeting was held. We had hoped that we would win more than 20 seats in Bihar. But we could not do so.

Q. Please tell us about the meeting that was held yesterday?

A. Yesterday we discussed the election results and it is true that NDA has got the majority as an alliance, which has two biggest constituent parties. One of these is Nitish Kumar's party JDU and the other is Chandrababu Naidu's party TDP. BJP has not got majority alone and if the government is formed, it will be formed

with the support of these two parties. Yesterday we have collectively decided that we will take the right steps at the right time and will fulfill the promises we have made to the public.

Q. If we talk about the beginning of the formation of India Alliance, and then tell us about the journey from the beginning to the meeting held yesterday. How was the experience?

A. You might remember that before the formation of India Alliance, we had organised a session in the party convention in Patna – on the question of unity. Nitish Kumar ji also came to it. Although at first he said that what I will do by coming here, but later he understood something and came to the convention. Then in the same convention, Tejashwi Yadav was also present and Salman Khurshid also came from Congress. So in a way the beginning had been made then. Then the result of Karnataka changed the atmosphere and the first meeting was held in Patna regarding the formation of India Alliance. Nitish Kumar was also in it. However, later when the results of the assembly elections in three states Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh came, Nitish Kumar started separating, and by January he separated completely. The elections held in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh before the general elections were fought as BJP versus Congress, whereas this election should have been fought

under the India alliance, which I see as a shortcoming. If this election had been fought under the India alliance, the results would have been different and its impact on the general elections would also have been positive.

Q. How much impact did it have in those days? And how did you set the narrative after that?

A. Certainly there was no dearth of challenges. After Nitish Kumar ji's separation, the notion was rapidly spread that the India Alliance does not exist. All kinds of things were said. Then whatever Narendra Modi did in the name of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya was an attempt to create a wave. So there were all these things. But after that you can say that the atmosphere changed in the three months of March, April and May. As far as setting the narrative is concerned, the BJP itself did this against itself during its ten years of rule. You remember that even before the 2019 elections, all the signs of attack on the Constitution had started coming. Whether it was the matter of removal of Article 370, or taking away the state status of Jammu and Kashmir, the question of not giving MSP to the farmers and later on the question of Uniform Civil Code and NRC, it started spreading among the people that the Narendra Modi government of BJP wants to impose the law made by Brahminist Manu on the country by removing the Constitution made by Dr. Ambedkar. There was the question of inflation, unemployment and corruption. Then the Agniveer Yojana worked to add fuel to the fire. So in this way you see that we did not set the narrative against the BJP gov-

ernment of Narendra Modi, rather it was set by the government itself among the people. The people who even today consider the Constitution necessary to protect their interests.

Q. It was also a new experience for CPI (ML) that an alliance was formed with parties like Congress, which have feudal elements, and to some extent you also got victory.

A. See, before 2019, when Rohit Vemula was institutionally murdered, we took to the streets carrying the ideas of Bhagat Singh and Dr. Ambedkar together. Then people said how can this happen. But we did it. We had an alliance with RJD and Congress in Bihar even before. In 2020, we also achieved success in the assembly elections. You see that there may be feudal elements in the Congress, but in the current

era you will find that they are no longer relevant. You see that the question of caste census was also raised by the leaders of the Congress. We all together put this question in front of the country. We raised the question of the interests of Dalits, tribals and backward class people and I am happy that the people of the country heard our questions and gave a mandate against Narendra Modi.

Q. Talking about the tribals, it was seen that in the states like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh etc. where there are tribals, your party is not seen or let's say that your influence was not seen. What will you say?

A. Don't mind, you have come to talk to me because our party has won in two Lok Sabha constituencies. But electoral politics has

its place and our presence and our struggle have its own place. We stand with the tribals of Jharkhand on their question. You see that the five seats that the All India Alliance has got in Jharkhand, whether it is Dumka or Lohardaga, are all reserved seats for the tribals. We have been fighting there since before. We have been with the tribals on the issue of their water, forest and land. Similarly, we have been with the tribals of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Now, in this entire struggle, not only political parties but civil society is also with them. So the basic thing is that you cannot decide this on the basis of electoral politics or say victory or defeat. You see that in Punjab, our party is working together with the farmers. Then whether it is Uttar Pradesh, Haryana or Rajasthan. □

NISHTHA JAIN'S DOCUMENTARY

'Farming the Revolution'

Narendra Pachkhédé

WHAT IS A LIFE IN A protest movement? Nishtha Jain answers that question with her feature documentary *Farming the Revolution*, the winner of the coveted Best International Feature Documentary award at the 2024 HotDocs Festival on May 3 in Toronto.

The jury lauded the film for its enduring "cinematic sophistication and indomitable lyrical presence," highlighting its effective portrayal of the power and persistence of ordinary people. The film was recognised for its deft narrative and visual eloquence in portraying a massive mobilisation of grassroots resistance.

Capturing the 16-month-long farmers' protest, one of the largest and longest mass protests in con-

temporary India—*Farming the Revolution*—Nishtha Jain invites viewers into a realm where defiance takes centre stage, weaving a narrative of extraordinary courage and resilience. Against the backdrop of a COVID-induced lockdown, people are transported to the heart of a monumental uprising, where farmers stand united in opposition to the Indian government's enactment of three contentious farm laws and fight the state's war of attrition.

In the film, the essence of the movement is poetically likened to "deep water, silent and quieter." This metaphor beautifully captures the profound nature of the cause, suggesting a depth that resonates with quiet intensity. This depth finds its anchorage in the ideological heritage

of the Left movement in Punjab.

With judicious use of voice-over narration and intermittent sound bytes from television reports, the film delicately propels its narrative forward while preserving the spontaneity and unpredictability of real-life moments. Niraj Gera's sound design completes the aural experience. Through this artful balance, Jain crafts a cinematic experience that is both immersive and redolent, inviting viewers to bear witness to the raw beauty and complexity of the human condition amidst the changing of seasons and brutality of life in a protest tent.

The screen brims with a palpable sense of community and conviviality, unapologetically weaving in the intricate political backdrop that emboldens the farmers' determination. Jain's lens remains unobtrusive, delicately observing her subjects without imposing direction.

Against the backdrop of a nation

in lockdown, the protest enclaves that blossom outside Delhi became more than mere encampments; they emerged as vibrant bastions of resistance, where the principles of coexistence were redefined, and women stood shoulder to shoulder as equal partners in the political struggle. Day after day, these protestors, relegated to the margins of mainstream attention, embodied India's diverse, unconquerable spirit. Together, they forge a new paradigm of coexistence, breathing life into sprawling protest sites that unfurl along the borders of Delhi.

For one thing this documentary is not a reportage of the Farmers' Movement per se. Rather, Jain's interests and focus are on the power equations in contemporary India, especially on women and labour. She is not interested in the "system" but in the "life-world" of the human condition she investigates.

Conscious of the politics of image making and self-representation, social hierarchies, women's empowerment, and labour movements, the director chose not to centre the year-long farmer protest around a single character.

Certain women command attention with their formidable presence. Among them is Harinder Bindu, the admired leader of the Indian Farmers' Union (BKU Ekta Ugrahan), whose spirited efforts mobilise women and marginalised Dalit labourers. Her lineage is etched with tragedy as her father fell victim to the separatist forces—Khalistanis—during the turbulent 1980s.

Jain's journey as a filmmaker has been marked by encounters with various people's movements. From her ventures into Bastar, a tribal region in Central India, in 2009, where her camera and footage were confiscated by authorities on the third day, to documenting the Dalit uprising in Una in Gujarat, in 2016 and the student uprising in 2017, each experience has left an indelible mark on her cinematic repertoire. While these episodes may find their place in a future essay film, her approach to filmmaking remains rooted in experiential storytelling, necessitating an intimate and non-transactional connection with her subjects. Despite the presence of several other filmmakers, each gain-

ing unique access to tell their story, Jain believes that together, all these films could portray a more holistic picture of this larger movement with an equally large political spectrum.

It was Jain's wish to capture the essence of the Shaheen Bagh movement—in the winter of 2019-20, Shaheen Bagh, a working-class Muslim neighbourhood in southeast Delhi, rose as a beacon of resistance against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)—in a documentary but faced obstacles in finding a central character amidst government crackdowns and subsequent disruptions caused by events like the Delhi riots and COVID lockdown.

However, Jain's HotDocs win propels her film forward to more competition, perhaps including the Oscars' limelight, redirecting focus from war narratives to the farmers' struggles that shape people's food system. □□□

(Narendra Pachkhédé is a critic and writer who splits his time between Toronto, London and Geneva. Courtesy: The Wire, an Indian nonprofit news and opinion website. It was founded in 2015 by Siddharth Varadarajan, Sidharth Bhatia, and M.K. Venu.)

281 MILLION PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Migrating Workers Provide Wealth

Vijay Prashad

EACH YEAR, THE INTERNATIONAL Organisation for Migration (IOM) releases its World Migration Report. Most of these reports are anodyne, pointing to a secular rise in migration during the period of neoliberalism. As states in the poorer parts of the world found themselves under assault from the Washington Consensus (cuts, privatisation, and austerity), and as employment became more and more precarious, larger and larger numbers of people took to the road to find a way to sustain their families.

That is why the IOM published its first World Migration Report in 2000, when it wrote that "it is estimated that there are more migrants in the world than ever before," it was between 1985 and 1990, the IOM calculated, that the rate of growth of world migration (2.59 percent) outstripped the rate of growth of the world population (1.7 percent).

The neoliberal attack on government expenditure in poorer countries was a key driver of international migration. Even by 1990, it had become clear that the migrants had

become an essential force in providing foreign exchange to their countries through increasing remittance payments to their families. By 2015, remittances—mostly by the international working class—outstripped the volume of Official Development Assistance (ODA) by three times and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). ODA is the aid money provided by states, whereas FDI is the investment money provided by private companies. For some countries, such as Mexico and the Philippines, remittance payments from working-class migrants prevented state bankruptcy.

This year's report notes that there are "roughly 281 million people worldwide" who are on the move.

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This is 3.6 percent of the global population. It is triple the 84 million people on the move in 1970, and much higher than the 153 million people in 1990. "Global trends point to more migration in the future," notes the IOM. Based on detailed studies, the IOM finds that the rise in migration can be attributed to three factors: war, economic precarity, and climate change.

First, people flee war, and with the increase in warfare, this has become a leading cause of displacement. Wars are not the result of human disagreement alone, since many of these problems can be resolved if calm heads are allowed to prevail; conflicts are exacerbated into war due to the immense scale of the arms trade and the pressures of the merchants of death to forgo peace initiatives and to use increasingly expensive weaponry to solve disputes. Global military spending is now nearly \$3 trillion, three-quarters of it by the Global North countries. Meanwhile, arms companies made a whopping \$600 billion in profits in 2022. Tens of millions of people are permanently displaced due to this profiteering by the merchants of death.

Second, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) calculates that about 58 percent of the global workforce—or 2 billion people—are in the informal sector. They work with minimal social protection and almost no rights in the workplace. The data on youth unemployment and youth precarity is stunning, with the Indian numbers horrifying. The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy shows that India's youth—between the ages of 15 and 24—are "faced by a double whammy of low and falling labour participation rates and shockingly high unemployment rates. The unemployment rate among youth stood at 45.4 percent in 2022-23. This is an alarming six times

higher than India's unemployment rate of 7.5 percent." Many of the migrants from West Africa who attempt the dangerous crossing of the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea flee the high rates of precarity, underemployment, and unemployment in the region. A 2018 report from the African Development Bank Group shows that due to the attack on global agriculture, peasants have moved from rural areas to cities into low-productivity informal services, from where they decide to leave for the lure of higher incomes in the West.

Third, more and more people are faced with the adverse impacts of the climate catastrophe. In 2015, at the Paris meeting on the Climate, government leaders agreed to set up a Task Force on Climate Migration; three years later, in 2018, the UN Global Compact agreed that those on the move for reasons of climate degradation must be protected. However, the concept of "climate refugees" is not yet established. In 2021, a World Bank report calculated that by 2050 there will be at least 216 million climate refugees.

The IOM's new report points out that these migrants—many of whom lead extremely precarious lives—send home larger and larger amounts of money to help their increasingly desperate families. "The money they send home," the IOM report notes, "increased by a staggering 650 [percent] during the period from 2000 to 2022, rising from \$128 billion to \$831 billion." Most of these remittances in the recent period, analysts show go to low-income and middle-income countries. Of the \$831 billion, for instance, \$647 billion goes to poorer nations. For most of these countries, the remittances sent home by working-class migrants far outstrip FDI and ODA put together and form a significant portion of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

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Several studies conducted by the World Bank show two important things about remittance payments. First, these are more evenly distributed amongst the poorer nations. FDI transactions typically favour the largest economies in the Global South, and they go toward sectors that are not always going to provide employment or income for the poorest sections of the population. Second, household surveys show that these remittances help to considerably lower poverty in middle-income and low-income countries. For example, remittance payments by working-class migrants reduced the rate of poverty in Ghana (by 5 percent), in Bangladesh (by 6 percent), and in Uganda (by 11 percent). Countries such as Mexico and the Philippines see their poverty rates rise drastically when remittances drop.

The treatment of these migrants, who are crucial for poverty reduction and for building wealth in society, is outrageous. They are treated as criminals, abandoned by their own countries who would rather spend vulgar amounts of money to attract much less impactful investment through multinational corporations. The data shows that there needs to be a shift in class perspective regarding investment. Migrant remittances are greater by volume and more impactful for society than the “hot money” that goes in and out of countries and does not “trickle down” into society.

If the migrants of the world—all 281 million of them—lived in one country, then they would form the fourth largest country in the world after India (1.4 billion), China (1.4 billion), and the United States (339

million). Yet, migrants receive few social protections and little respect (a new publication from the Zetkin Forum for Social Research shows, for instance, how Europe criminalizes migrants). In many cases, their wages are suppressed due to their lack of documentation, and their remittances are taxed heavily by international wire services (PayPal, Western Union, and Moneygram) which charge high fees to both the sender and the recipient. As yet, there are only small political initiatives that stand with the migrants, but no platform that unites their numbers into a powerful political force. □□□

[Vijay Prashad is an Indian historian, editor, and journalist. He is a writing fellow and chief correspondent at Globetrotter. He is an editor of LeftWord Books and the director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research. He has written more than 20 books. Source: countercurrents.org]

MODI IN POWER AGAIN

Whither Hindu Nationalism?

Ram Puniyani

THE FAILURE OF THE BHARATIYA Janata Party (BJP) to get past 272 has brought back the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to the forefront. While Vajpayee came to power and led the NDA Government in 1998, still there was a strong imprint of the BJP politics in the Government. Among other things that were part of the Hindutva agenda at that time was the appointment of the Venkatchaliah Commission to review the Constitution and Saffronisation of the textbooks and the introduction of courses in astrology and Paurohitya (Rituals) in the curriculum. Twice, in 2014 and 2019, Modi came to power as NDA but as BJP on its own had an overwhelming majority the other components of the Government were on the ‘silent mode’ and BJP aggressively launched

its Hindu nationalist agenda, the building of Ram Temple and abolition of article 370. In addition, the fringe elements killing Muslims on the pretext of cow beef and love jihad had a free hand, enjoying impunity from the state.

In the other authoritarian streaks of Modi Government, the subordination of Constitutional institutions was very dominating along with the role of conversion of Media into Godi media. All this did make the opposition wake up and come together as INDIA. Despite this formation coming into being Modi and BJP centered their election propaganda around anti-Muslim rhetoric. Starting from the propaganda that the Congress manifesto was labelled as having the imprint of the Muslim League, most other slogans and promises of Congress were turned

into being presented as appeasement of Muslims. Muslims were called Ghuspathiye (infiltrators) and had more children. Modi’s propaganda reached a new low when he said Congress would do mujra (a dance that emerged during Mughal rule) for them. Also, it was said that If Congress comes to power terrorists will be released and invited to have Biryani, Taliban rule will be established.

The system has been so tuned that the names of many Muslims do not find a place in electoral rolls, at election booths, many Muslims are turned away by the police. Muslims have been effectively turned into second-class citizens and have been made politically invisible. All this intensifies the prevalent hate against this hapless community.

With this background as the BJP failed to reach the propagated 400 par for NDA and more than 370 for BJP, there was a big sigh of relief in the community. As the results came and Modi declared himself as the

next Prime Minister, he toned down his language to recall 'Sarva Dharma Sambhav' (Equal respect for all religions). This sounded like the sort of peak of hypocrisy in light of what happened to Muslims (and Christians) during the last ten years.

What is in store for this community in times to come? A small relief is possible as probably the impunity enjoyed by the fringe elements may be slightly curtailed. There is a big if as the fringe elements by now are too much rooted in the system. Whether allies like Niteesh and Naidu will be able to raise their voice against this scattered anti-Muslim violence is yet to be seen. How effective they can be against the strong-arm tactics of the Modi party, only time will tell. The hate spread by the Hindu nationalists is so widespread that it may not be easy to curtail it.

It is likely that the third pillar of Hindutva politics, the Uniform Civil Code, may be deferred in all probability. The CAA, which discriminates against Muslims is like a hanging sword and time alone will tell people how much pressure the BJP will put to implement it. Surely after the remarkable Shaheen Bagh movement, the communal party BJP will not insist on it unless they feel through experience that they can bulldoze their way despite the Naidu and Niteesh, who are more tactical in

these matters. Already BJP has allied with Naidu who had initiated four percent reservation for Muslims.

The other major issue of caste census, to which BJP is opposed, may have to be rethought as it was Niteesh as CM of Bihar, where this was initiated and there is a strong national sentiment for it. There are no buyers for Modi's propaganda that the INDIA alliance will remove the reservations for SC/ST/OBC and give them to Muslims.

What can one expect about the Muslim's social, political, and economic conditions? The hate spread against this community by the RSS combine has sunk deep into the social thinking. By default Muslim thinking has become part of average perceptions of the society. The consistent work of this RSS combine has gone up exponentially due to the other associates, the changes in textbooks, the role of media, and the word-of-mouth spread of misconceptions.

These myths, and misconceptions are the solid pillars on which Hate is constructed and due to prevalent hate against Muslims, violence and subsequent polarisation are brought in. While the role of RSS in the 2024 elections needs further analysis, it is RSS machinations that keep pumping up the Hate against Muslims and now from the last two

decades against Christians also. Interestingly the number of RSS shakhas during Modi rule has more than doubled during the last ten years. One suspects that in a state like Orissa where Kandhamal violence took place and Pastor Stains was burnt alive, the roots of BJP's political rise were watered and now people see its results.

While in Kerala, the BJP does win over a section of Christians for various reasons, nationally Christians are on the target of Hindu nationalist politics, as seen by the rising sub-radar attacks on prayer meetings of Christians.

All said and done the marginalisation of Muslims will continue. It is not easy to undo the deep polarisation introduced into society due to the work done by this organisation. What RSS has been doing was well diagnosed by India's first Home Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, when he wrote, "All their speeches were full of communal poison, as a result of the poison the country had to suffer the sacrifice of the invaluable life of Gandhiji" (Writing after banning of Sangh in 1948). This aspect of our political life was not curtailed-combated and it grew into a multi-headed hydra using every opportunity to intensify the religious division in the society. □□□

EMERGENCE OF ENGINEER RASHEED

Kashmir Opera

Nayeema Ahmad Mahjoor

WHEN THE RECENTLY elected Parliament member Engineer Rasheed joined the mainstream politics of Jammu and Kashmir about fifteen years ago, hardly anyone expected that in about a few years, he would turn the tide of local politics in such a way that the old and traditional

political parties would feel threatened or defeated by him, that too when he had been in prison for the last five years. His student son campaigned for him.

Two major mainstream political parties, the National Conference and the People's Democratic Party, are fighting for their survival and cred-

ibility after the BJP government in Delhi scrapped internal autonomy and degraded the once-princely state of JK in 2019. They have been under a barrage of propaganda campaigns for being dynastic clans of the erstwhile state.

Engineer Rasheed has been imprisoned on charges of terror funding of militants, the charges of which are still unproven. His party is fragmented, his children are young, and his family struggles to make ends meet. There was no clear-cut policy

for running his election campaign. Despite so many odds, it was not in anyone's imagination that he would win the Lok Sabha seat with hundreds of thousands of votes and create a new storm in Kashmir politics. Engineer Rasheed did not defeat the two heads of political parties but beat them with a huge margin of votes.

The results shocked political parties. Since then, there has been considerable internal turmoil among the mainstream political parties in Kashmir, which are already fighting for their existence in the face of intense criticism from their voters and propaganda from the ruling BJP at the centre.

People are unhappy with Jammu and Kashmir's traditional politicians' performance and policies. According to one of the political activists, 'the main political party, which had a solid voter base and popularity, never considered the people's sentiments but kept its stronghold on power, exploiting the separatist ideology in the Valley'.

Meanwhile, the BJP has focused on establishing new leadership in JK and propagated the idea that dynastic politics is responsible for all the woes in Jammu and Kashmir. 'Art 370 of the Indian constitution was considered a hurdle in the integration

with India that was exploited by the dynastic politicians'. National Conference and People's Democratic Party have denounced the allegations and blamed the BJP for raising religious hatred to disempower the Muslim majority in Kashmir. It has succeeded in India by not fielding a single Muslim candidate, and neither gives any representation to the fourteen percent Muslim population.

The media reported that the PDP and Democratic Azad Party not only promised to support Engineer Rasheed in the Parliamentary voting but also encouraged their voters to support him. Watching his epic public rallies organised by his son, they thought their defeat was imminent. Both parties tried to gain sympathy by supporting the incarcerated former legislator to save them from humiliation.

When Engineer Rashid's son suddenly announced that he would submit his father's nomination papers for his candidature, most people and political parties were sure the Indian government would get his papers rejected. Surprisingly, this did not happen.

Some opposition parties spread the news through the media that, like Sajjad Lone's People's Conference, Altaf Bukhari's Apni party, and Ghulam Nabi Azad's Democratic Azad Party, the BJP has also blessed Engineer Rashid because, contrary to expectations, B J P had not fielded any candidate for the three Lok Sabha seats in the valley but openly supported other candidates except NC and PDP ones.

One reason could be the compulsion of the BJP not to field a Muslim candidate in a Muslim-majority area, which would go against its anti-Muslim policy and prove counterproductive to its campaign, and the other reason is that despite five years of working at the ground in JK, the ground has not been smoothed for it, which could have led to its defeat. It

would have been interpreted as a wrong policy to remove Article 370, which the BJP has been boosting in the election campaign in the other states of India.

Can Engineer Rasheed's sudden entry be considered a new BJP strategy in the election?

This question is on the mind of every Kashmiri today. The BJP government is in complete control of JK. Who should talk? Who would contest the elections and get a seat in the mainstream? The BJP has all the rights reserved for it. In such a situation, was Rasheed a new strategy? Was it to contain the NC and PDP?

This question is tricky to answer. There are no clear indications of whether Engineer Rashid is BJP's Project B. Most parties under Project A have yet to deliver anything on the ground. The precise situation will emerge only after the announcement of the assembly elections.

Engineer Rashid's son adopted an unusual strategy during the election campaign. He asked to vote to get his father released. Some commentators say that since Rasheed has interpreted public sentiments and thoughts in the past, the public blindly voted for him.

One might recall that Engineer Rashid repeatedly raised his voice for the right of self-determination on the assembly floor after winning the elections. Will he be able to play a leading role in the Lok Sabha with the same spirit that India did during its independence movement from the British Empire, or does he want to adopt the Scottish model and make his voice more effective on the democratic platform?

However, political scientists express their disarray and say that Indian democracy has little space, and Engineer Rasheed will not be allowed even if it had followed the same path.

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Social activist Raja Farooq says that the 'BJP government has done a lot of homework to change the mindset of some freedom fighters over the last several years. Most of them have been imprisoned in jails for decades. They have been pressured to abandon the Azadi movement, and hopefully, many plan to participate in the assembly elections.

Apart from Engineer Rasheed's

entry, Azadi Pasands factions, and Jamaat-e-Islami's desire to contest elections, there is also a rumour that Mirwaiz Umer Farooq's Awami Action Committee is planning to participate in the coming elections. BJP will continue its strong support behind the scenes by fielding some candidates.

Suppose such an electoral scenario emerges or is strategised in

Jammu and Kashmir; in that case, it will not only be difficult for the old and traditional parties to win the franchise, but it will also start the end of dynastic politics in Jammu and Kashmir, as the BJP promised.

The ruling party seems adamant about having 'Naya Kashmir' with new faces, thoughts, and Indianness.□

[Nayeema Ahmad Mahjoor is an Author and Journalist. Countercurrents.org]

WSF IN NEPAL

True Face of Nepal's Communist Rulers

Lok Bhattarai

THE DILEMMA IN NEPAL lies in the juxtaposition of its present government, led by former Maoist rebels who once championed the abolition of individual property and the establishment of a communist state, with their lack of interest, formal support, and participation in the World Social Forum (WSF). Despite their ideological roots, the ruling party's absence in any form of this global event raises questions about their commitment to grassroots activism and international solidarity.

The further dilemma in Nepal arises from the Nepali Congress, the oldest democratic party in the country, which was a key partner in the coalition government when the WSF was held in Nepal and has formal commitments to socialism and social justice. Despite being a member of the Socialist International, the Nepali Congress showed no signs of support for the World Social Forum, raising questions about its alignment with global movements for social change and justice.

In the broader context of neoliberalism promoted by institutions like the World Bank and multinational corporations, the world continues to grapple with profound social inequality, pervasive poverty, and widespread hunger. The consequences

of neoliberalism are stark, exacerbating existing inequalities and leaving millions marginalized, while a select few accrue immense wealth and power at the expense of human rights and the environment.

WSF emerged in the early 2000s as a response to the growing discontent with the neoliberal policies promoted by institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The WSF provided a platform for grassroots organisations, activists, and social movements to come together and challenge the dominance of corporate globalisation. Brazil played a crucial role in the foundational stages of the WSF, hosting its inaugural meeting in Porto Alegre in 2001. Brazilian activists and intellectuals, inspired by the country's rich tradition of social movements and popular mobilisation, spearheaded efforts to organise the forum. Their commitment to social justice and participatory democracy laid the groundwork for the WSF's evolution into a global phenomenon, hosting annual gatherings that continue to galvanize movements for a more just and equitable world.

The World Social Forum stands as a counterforce to the World Economic Forum and the capitalist

worldview it represents. Founded in 2001, the WSF serves as a beacon of resistance, offering an alternative space for grassroots movements, activists, and civil society organizations to converge. Unlike traditional political organizations, the WSF remains a decentralized and open platform, devoid of formal authority or hierarchy. It serves as a forum for sharing experiences, ideas, and strategies, showcasing diverse resistance movements from around the globe. Despite its immense influence, the WSF refrains from transforming into a political entity or advocating for specific actions, instead prioritizing dialogue, collaboration, and solidarity in the pursuit of social justice and systemic change.

WSF Charter explicitly prohibits the involvement of political parties, reflecting its commitment to grassroots activism and inclusive dialogue. However, this stance has led to dilemmas when addressing complex issues such as territorial conflicts between environmental protection and economic development projects that promise local employment. Balancing local needs with global issues poses another challenge, as prioritising one may inadvertently neglect the other. Additionally, smaller localized resistance movements face hurdles in transforming into global movements due to limited resources, coordination difficulties, and differing priorities. Despite these dilemmas, the WSF

remains dedicated to fostering solidarity and collaboration among diverse movements, navigating tensions through inclusive discussions and collective action. By amplifying the voices of marginalised communities and promoting cross-border solidarity, the WSF continues to drive forward the struggle for social justice on a global scale.

Gathering thousands of people in one city for the WSF poses significant logistical and financial challenges each year. Ensuring meaningful, impact-driven discussions amidst such large gatherings is hindered by the prevalence of traditional talk programs where presenters speak without or less engaging participants. Moreover, many sessions are structured like classroom settings, leading to limited participation and engagement. Overcoming these challenges requires innova-

tive approaches to facilitate dynamic dialogue, foster active participation, and prioritize the diverse voices and experiences of attendees. Efforts to break away from traditional models and create inclusive, interactive spaces are essential for maximizing the WSF's potential as a catalyst for social change.

Language diversity poses a significant challenge at the WSF, where participants come from diverse linguistic backgrounds. This creates barriers to effective communication and meaningful engagement, particularly as hierarchical dynamics often privilege those fluent in dominant languages or occupying senior roles in international organisations or academic institutions. Grassroots activists and marginalized communities, often lacking fluency in these languages or formal education, may find themselves marginalized within discussions and decision-making processes. Overcoming language barriers and challenging hierarchical structures is essential to ensure inclusive participation and amplify the voices of all attendees at the WSF.

The decision to host the WSF in Nepal at the beginning of 2024 raised questions about the rationale behind selecting a country with a lack of locally originated resistance movements. Nepal's socio-political landscape, dominated by international aid-driven initiatives and limited grassroots activism, stood in contrast to the WSF's ethos of grassroots mobilization and autonomous social movements. The choice highlighted the disconnect between global aspirations for social justice and the reality of Nepal's dependency on Western-funded NGOs for social change initiatives. Hosting the WSF in Nepal underscored the need to address systemic barriers to grassroots organising and foster indigenous-led movements for meaningful social transformation.

Similarly, a lack of interest from national media outlets in Nepal resulted in minimal public participation and engagement in the WSF, undermining its potential impact. This apathy reflects a broader scepticism among Nepali citizens towards activities promoted by the NGO sector, viewing them as driven solely by funding from wealthy Western donors.

The World Social Forum presented a golden opportunity for the prime minister and Communist leader to reaffirm their commitment to their original agenda and the principles of the former rebel party. With a platform emphasising opposition to multinational corporations, participation in the WSF could have showcased their dedication to grassroots activism and global solidarity. By aligning with the values promoted at the forum, the prime minister could have demonstrated leadership in advancing social justice and challenging neoliberalism, thereby strengthening their legitimacy and support among their base. Amidst participants sharing global resistance experiences in Kathmandu, a paradox emerged as the prime minister and his government prioritised inviting celebrities like Warren Buffet, Elon Musk, and Mark Zuckerberg to a Nepal investment summit. This contrast underscores a disconnect between grassroots activism and government priorities, highlighting divergent paths in addressing social justice issues versus courting international investment, presenting a poignant reflection on the complexities of Nepal's socio-political landscape.

The World Social Forum in Nepal represented a lost opportunity in a country grappling with increasing inequality, international debt, and systemic corruption. Dr. Lok Bhattarai is academics and has been a Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Education in London and involved in global activism for equality and social justice. □□

URGENT APPEAL

This unique world law fortnightly—perhaps the only law journal in India which regularly publishes important foreign and international courts' decisions—as also provides copious information regarding the socio-economic/political conditions of various countries the world over and invites/publishes thought provoking articles on the pressing problems and crises faced by the people of the world in various spheres—is running on heavy losses and is IN DANGER OF BEING CLOSED DOWN SOON unless subscribers, admirers/well-wishers rise to the occasion and render crucial help in the form of causing many more subscriptions, advertisements (Rs 15,000 or more) and donations at the earliest and regularly. Hope and request all such sympathetic persons/institutions would chip in with their precious aid.

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VANISHING WORK

'If AI Takes Over...'**Nandini Ramnath**

IN 2021, VOICE ARTIST CHETAN Shashital was asked to voice Bal Thackeray for the Marathi film *Balkadu*, which is based on the Shiv Sena founder's ideology. When Shashital sent the producers a sample based on a speech that had been shared with him, pat came the reply: you have sent us back Thackeray's speech by mistake.

Balkadu's makers could not distinguish between Thackeray's original voice and Shashital's pitch-perfect imitation. Though most people don't realise it, the talents of dubbing and voiceover artists like Shashital are part of our daily lives. We hear them not just in films and web shows dubbed into other languages, animated productions and corporate videos, but also on automated phone messages when we're told to hold or press a button, in public service announcements and in car navigation systems.

But now, this thriving industry faces an unforeseen challenge: artificial intelligence.

Just like robots have supplemented workers in factories, AI software that can replicate human voices is edging artists out of jobs. In India, AI-aided voicing is already being used in corporate films, audio-books and commercials, industry insiders say.

The situation is alarming enough to merit a pushback from the Mumbai-based Association of Voice Artists, whose 1,000 or so members work in advertising, film and television. "If AI takes over, we are finished," said Amarinder Singh Sodhi, the association's general secretary. "As voice artists, we need to get

some regulation in place so that our livelihood is protected."

When the Association of Voice Artists was established in 1999 to push for fair wages, settle payment disputes and arrange medical benefits, its members never anticipated that they would face a challenge from non-human competition.

Ganesh Divekar, the association's president, explained how jobs for voice-over artists could evaporate with AI. A film that has 10 major characters and several minor ones would usually need 30 or 40 artists when it is being dubbed into another language, he said. But with AI, it could be done with two male and two female artists.

"AI can take the texture of the actors and apply it to the performances, a process that is called voice cloning."

The process of harvesting voices to be fed into AI programmes has been underway for at least a decade, the association's office-bearers say. "Voice artists were giving voice samples to technology companies without realising that these samples would be used to generate new content that could be exploited till eternity," Sodhi said. "They were paid what they thought was a handsome sum, but they ended up signing over their voices for life."

In one instance, a voice artist told the association about being hired by an automotive company for what she was thought was a vehicular navigation system. "Without any contract in place, she started recording her voice," said Akshay Shetty, the association's lawyer. "But the script that was given to her had nothing to do with navigation. She

had to read random words and excerpts from a novel. What she didn't realise then was that her voice was being used to train the AI."

While AI sites provide tools to generate voices, the software has been constructed using human inputs, Shetty noted. "Somebody has fed a particular voice into the algorithm," he said. "So should that particular voice artist not be paid for the new content that is being generated?"

The voice artists realised the extent of the challenge they faced when assignments started disappearing, Shetty added. "The guys who were giving voices for advertisements and corporate audio-visuals found that the work was drying up," he said. "Why would that be the case when these sectors were actually growing?"

The union has issued guidelines to help its members navigate this unfamiliar terrain. "We can't stop the march of technology," Shetty said. "What we are saying is, know what you are getting into. The best we can do is creating awareness. If artists do decide to turn over their voice rights to AI companies, they should charge them well since this it's for perpetuity."

Sodhi added: "We're telling our members to be clear about what exactly will the voice be used for, for how long, for how many mediums." He said that this is "a survival of a fittest scenario, so we have to negotiate options for everybody concerned". He added that if even one of the association's members benefits from these guidelines, it would be a victory for all.

The AI problem does not hurt only voiceover and dubbing artists but also the dubbing producers who hire them for assignments. AI is attractive to producers looking to cut costs, even if the AI-generated voice sounds mechanical.

Two factors have kept AI away

from Indian films and shows so far. One is that AI-generated voices sound tinny and machine-like. "AI hasn't impacted voicing in films because it doesn't give the desired results," said dubbing producer Ashim Samanta.

He recalls being sent samples by an Israeli company that had dubbed a series with AI software. "It was so bad that I couldn't stand it beyond two minutes," Samanta said. "Dubbing requires drama, emotions and expression. Whatever we have seen so far is pathetic."

But he added, "Of course, we don't know what will happen a few years from now."

The bigger hurdle for AI is already evident in navigational tools and virtual assistants: the Indian

accent is impossible to crack because there isn't a standard Indian accent.

India's staggering linguistic diversity, range of accents and colloquialisms have created a high wall between the voice industry and AI that will be very hard to scale, at least for some years. "When people ask me to send a voice sample, I ask, which one?" said Chetan Shashital, who has voiced numerous commercials and dubbed for actors across languages.

Voicing is a form of acting too, involving skilful mimicry as well as dramatic expression, Shashital pointed out. His first major film job was in 1989, when he dubbed for Pinchoo Kapoor after the actor died

suddenly. Shashital was 18 years old; Kapoor 62. Shashital didn't just have to sound like Kapoor but also emote in the actor's style.

"We have the intelligence, whereas AI is artificial—how will it generate the accents and emotions?" Shashital said. His contract threatens legal action against his voice being used by AI programmes.

No doubt the human touch is missing—for now, said dubbing producer Eliza Lewis. "But the day AI cracks Indian emotions, it will get really difficult," she added. "People adapt—35mm was replaced by digital technology. The local grocer faced competition from the likes of DMart. The grocer is still around, but for how long?" □□□

LETTERS

Withdraw the Prosecution

It bears noting that the sanction given by the LG for prosecuting Arundhati Roy and Showkat Husain for offences u/s 153A, 153B and 505 IPC is hit by Sec. 468 CrPC which bars courts from taking cognisance of cases after a delay of 3 years when the offences carry a maximum sentence of 3 years. It seems plausible that the LG's sanction to prosecute for offences under section 13 UAPA (which carries a sentence of 7 years) after a gap of fourteen years is to get over this legal hurdle.

The invocation of the UAPA by the LG is politically motivated, patently unconscionable and vindictive. Prima facie, it does not flow out of any concern for national security or national interest but seeks to deploy the UAPA as a tool to serve one's political masters. This is obvious from the fact that it is not even the LG's case that the speeches made by Arundhati Roy and others at a convention on Kashmir, 'Azadi: The Only Way', organised in New Delhi in October 2010 provoked violent disturbance in 2024, thereby necessitating

urgent legal action under the UAPA!

A mature constitutional democracy ought not to prosecute speech, which by itself has no direct causal connection to violence or disorder. It is shameful that an FIR was even registered for speech which by all accounts did not incite or provoke any form of violence and even more reprehensible that the LG has granted sanction to prosecute, that too in 2024!

We condemn this knee-jerk reaction to grant sanction to prosecute an alleged offence committed almost fourteen years ago as nothing other than an attempt by the administration to intimidate and browbeat courageous writers and thinkers who dare to speak truth to power.

**Kavita Srivastava, President, PUCL
Dr V. Suresh, Gen. Secretary, PUCL
Greater Nicobar**

International Airport

To
Social Welfare Dept
A&N Administration
Sir,

It is unfortunate that the Social Impact Assessment Report was prepared by a so-called "consultant" who does not appear to have an understanding

of the socio-economic milieu of Andaman & Nicobar Islands, in particular of the presence of highly vulnerable tribal groups, namely, Shompens and Nicobarese. Any project in Greater Nicobar Island, irrespective of its location and the extent of land occupied, has both direct and indirect impacts on those two tribal groups but the SIA report is totally silent on it.

Apparently, the Social Welfare Department is unaware of the Constitutional protection conferred on such tribals and the likely impact of such a huge project and its downstream implications in terms of tourism and increased footprint on the Tribal Reserve declared under A&N Islands Protection of Aboriginal Tribes Regulation (ANIPATR) notified through a Presidential Proclamation in 1956 under Article 243(2) of the Constitution.

Section 11 of the above cited Constitutional Regulation prohibits the application of any other law that violates the intent of that Regulation.

Any social impact study of such a huge project, if it fails to evaluate its impact on the Tribal Reserve declared as such under ANIPATR, would have no legal validity. An SIA study of this

kind in which the impact of a project on aboriginal tribes cannot be done by any agency without expert inputs from reputed anthropologists and, in particular from the Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) that has done studies on Shompens and Nicobarese, would be misleading and meaningless.

If the A&N administration can get an SIA study prepared with help from ASI, such a study needs to be placed before the Tribal Council constituted under Section 3(1) of ANIPATR for their prior consent, without which the whole process of the SIA would stand legally vitiated.

I, therefore, demand that the SIA study prepared at such a high cost to the public exchequer without complying with the statutory requirements be withdrawn forthwith.

Yours faithfully,

E A S Sarma

Former Secretary to the Government of India, Visakhapatnam

Theatre for the Oppressed

“Growing up, we struggled a lot. After realising how unfairly scheduled caste and tribe members are treated in society and how we are discriminated against, we decided to form a group to collectively fight for our rights. The Adivasi Dalit Students Theatre Movement is a result of that,” said Jishnu, a founding member.

Though there are several Dalit/Adivasi theatre groups across the country, this could be the first students’ initiative, the members said.

On how the idea became a reality, Kallu Kalyani, a theatre artist, said she and Jishnu, along with a few friends, formed the troupe Plaphy in 2018.

“Plaphy used to write and perform street plays... taking up the Madhu murder case, the Kathua rape case, etc. However, we couldn’t continue with it as the members joined new courses or left for higher studies. The idea of a theatre movement again came to our minds when Jishnu and I were studying at the Thrissur School of Drama,” said Kallu, who is now an active member of the movement.

Started with three persons, the theatre group now has around 30 members from across the state of Kerala.

“Several orientation sessions, in collaboration with the Adishakti Summer School, helped create awareness among the community members about the situation and in mobilising them,” Jishnu pointed out.

Recently a team of 10 from the movement performed ‘Engale Oche’, a dramatic adaptation of C Ayyappan’s short story ‘Ente Kathayile Ningal’.

At a time when the Constitution and the Ambedkarite ideologies are being questioned, the group felt it was important to tell society about the lives of scheduled caste and tribe people and their lives and struggles.

Through the play, the movement is attempting to express everything from their political point of view.

Anna Jose, Kerala

Social Media and Democracy

After Modi became Prime Minister in 2014, he went to the United States and hugged Mark Zuckerberg. That photograph reminds people of the power of social media in manipulating democratic outcomes. Narendra Modi is not an outlier.

Aided by social media, Barack Obama and Donald Trump rose to prominence and took charge as successive Presidents of the United States of America. In the United Kingdom, the vote on the Brexit referendum was influenced mainly by micro-targeting and manipulating social media audiences. The Arab Spring, primarily an outcome of Twitter, sprung not from the Middle East but from algorithms developed by the engineers at Twitter in the United States.

The consequences of producing, distributing and consuming content without editorial filters are enormous. Algorithms designed to generate a maximum number of views and maximum revenue for the shareholders of social media companies are seriously manipulating democratic outcomes in countries worldwide. And India is no

exception. Modi’s party–Bharatiya Janata Party–used social media extensively to influence voters.

Examples are aplenty of how social media platforms and their algorithms aid and abet revolutions and manipulate electoral outcomes.

Team Madras Courier

A Selfless

Servant of Tribals

Thakkar Bapa was a giant among social servants in India. Bapa was a pioneer in the service of the tribal community in India. He began by serving the tribals of the Panchmahal region in Gujarat. In 1914, he resigned from Bombay Municipality and joined the Servants of India Society, established by Gopal Krishna Gokhale.

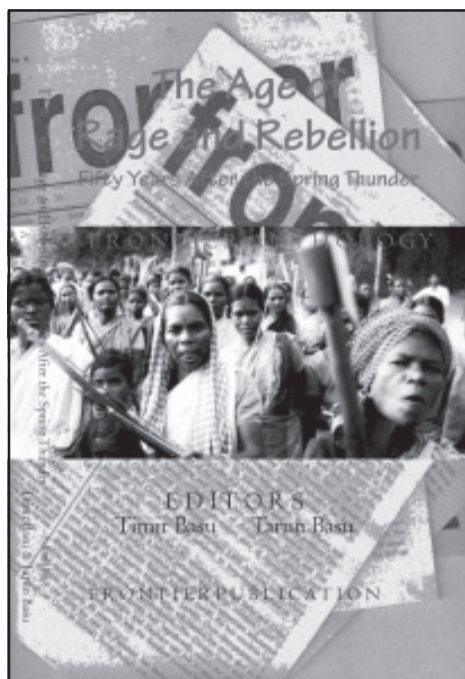
During the years 1920 and 1921, Gujarat was under the grip of severe famine. The Servants of India Society assigned the famine relief work in Gujarat to Thakkar Bapa. Here, he came into contact with the Bhil tribals living in the Dahod and Jhalod taluks. He soon realised that a lot of hard work was needed to raise the living standards of the Bhils. It ran a number of schools to serve the educational needs of the Bhil children. It opened two dispensaries to deliver medicines. A large number of wells were constructed for the benefit of the Bhils. It also undertook temperance work to wean the Bhils off the drunken habit. Bapa realised that the Bhils were incurring debts for agricultural purposes. They were heavily indebted to moneylenders.

Bapa was eager to serve the tribal communities across India. He visited the Bastar state of the Central Provinces, Akrani Mahal in West Khandesh, Santhal Parganas of Bihar and Bengal, South Orissa, hill districts of Assam, and Naga Hills. He studied the conditions of indigenous tribes in these regions. Thakkar Bapa’s expertise in tribal affairs was sought after by many provincial governments. In 1948, he formed a federation called Bharatiya Adim Jati Sevak Sangh with Dr Rajendra Prasad as president to serve the tribals.

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