

frontier

Vol. 57 : No. 11

ISSN 0016-2094

September 8-14, 2024

Founder-Editor : **SAMAR SEN**

On Other Pages

Comment	2
Note	3
HUMRA QURAISHI's COLUMN Mockery of Women's Day Humra Quraishi	3
BOOMING GIG ECONOMY 'Prisoners on Wheels' T Navin	5
'LAPATA LADIES' In Search of the Lost Girls Partha Sarathi	6
RS 5 CRORE BOUNTY Reward-carrying Maoists or Civilians? Malini Subramaniam	9
RECALLING A CLASSIC PAAR 40 Harsh Thakor	11
POINT OF VIEW A 'Revolutionary Verdict' Balakrishna Ganeshan	12
TWO SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT Religion didn't Produce Philosophy Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd	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

Website: <https://www.frontierweekly.com>
Telephone : 2530-0065

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

Hypocrisy Unlimited

PERHAPS IT IS A POLITICAL FASHION TO SHED TEARS FOR genocide in Gaza. All these empty words are meaningless to the Palestinians. They want justice, not rhetoric. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was accused of stark hypocrisy after he condemned the Myanmar's military's genocide against the Rohingya people while simultaneously aiding Israel's genocidal assault on the Gaza strip. It's the seventh anniversary of Myanmar's barbaric ethnic cleansing. And the world remains silent. Nor does the UN make any effort to help the Rohingyas.

Blinken issued a statement highlighting the US State Department's 'extensive documentation of the atrocities and abuses committed against Rohingya and all civilians'—a sharp contrast with the American administration's reluctance to assess Israeli atrocities against Palestinians in the Gaza strip and West Bank. Even at the time of writing Palestinians fled the Al-Aqsa martyrs Hospital in central Gaza after the Israeli military again ordered people to immediately leave parts of Dieral-Balah.

American double standard is phenomenal. Under Blinken's stewardship, the US government has approved massive arms transfer to Israel—including a recent \$20 billion sale—and provided diplomatic cover for the country's far-right government in the UN and broadly on the world stage, dismissing as meritless the South Africa-led genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice. Israel's military has so far killed more than 40,000 people while injuring countless Gazans since the October 7 Hamas-led attack on Israeli civilians. The Hamas horror was equally barbaric. But Israel's barbarism surpasses all previous records of army brutality. Most of those killed in Israel's continued assault have been women and children—including thousands of infants and toddlers.

In addition to perpetrating horrific war crimes with US weapons Israel has sold arms to Myanmar's military junta, even after the 2021 military coup. In the years in which the country was openly ruled by its military junta Israel continued its arms trade through the genocide of 2016-17.

As Israel launches a massive attack on Lebanon the prospects of a cease-fire deal seem bleak. The Israeli Defence Forces started carpet bombing, kicking off a major escalation in the region, endangering tens of thousands of civilians and heightening the chances of an all-out regional war. In truth Israel is trying to drag America directly into the war to fight

against what they call the Iranian axis of evil and its proxies led by Hezbollah. The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) said Hezbollah, the Iran-backed militant group, was preparing to launch an extensive rocket and missile attack against central and northern Israel. So to neutralise these threats their fighter jets targeted 'Hezbollah positions'. But they can't explain why only civilians die. In a show of support for Israel and an

attempt to deter Iran the US has steadily moved Navy forces closer to the area.

Israel's bombardment of Lebanon came after another horrific day in the Gaza strip, where the IDF killed dozens of Palestinians in southern Gaza. Among the dead were 11 members of a family, including two children, after an airstrike hit their home in Khan Younis. These disturbing developments occur even as

Israel and Hamas are set to negotiate peace in Cairo. Israeli desperation to hunt for the Hamas top leader has been like chasing a mirage!

While they talk day in and day out about destruction of infrastructure in Ukraine but forget to mention how destruction of residential buildings, including schools and hospitals, has transformed Gaza into a ghost land. □□□

COMMENT

Of Press and Freedom

INDIA, A NATION REVERED AS the world's largest democracy, finds itself in a precarious situation concerning press freedom. Ranked 159th out of 180 countries in the 2024 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders, the country's position has plummeted to an alarming low. This ranking is not just a number; it is a reflection of the deep-seated issues that threaten the very core of democratic values in India. The press, often described as the fourth pillar of democracy, is meant to function as the watchdog of the government, the voice of the people, and the defender of the truth. However, the current state of press freedom in India raises critical questions about the nation's commitment to these principles.

At the other end of the spectrum is Norway, which has consistently held the top position in the World Press Freedom Index. The contrast between Norway and India is stark and instructive. Norway's success is not merely a consequence of strong legal frameworks but also a result of a culture that deeply respects and protects journalistic freedom. Norwegian journalists operate in an environment where the press is truly independent, free from political and economic pressures, and supported

by a robust legal system that defends their rights. The public's trust in the media is high, and this trust is earned through rigorous adherence to ethical journalism.

In Norway, the relationship between the state and the press is characterised by mutual respect. The government understands that a free press is not a threat to its power but a necessary element of a functioning democracy. This understanding is enshrined in laws that protect journalists from harassment and ensure their safety. Moreover, the judiciary in Norway plays a critical role in upholding press freedom, providing a legal safety net that allows journalists to perform their duties without fear of reprisal.

India's decline in the press freedom rankings is not an isolated incident but the result of a series of systemic issues that have been festering for years. These challenges can be broadly categorised into three areas: political pressures, economic constraints, and threats to journalists' safety.

In recent years, the Indian press has increasingly found itself at the receiving end of political pressures. The relationship between the media and the government has become increasingly adversarial, with jour-

nalists often facing censorship, harassment, and intimidation for reporting on issues that are deemed sensitive or critical of the government.

The political landscape in India is such that media houses, especially those with large corporate ownership, often face indirect pressures to align their editorial policies with the ruling government's agenda. This results in a narrowing of the space for dissenting voices and a homogenisation of news content that undermines the diversity of opinions that is essential for a healthy democracy.

The commercialisation of news has also contributed to the decline in press freedom in India. The reliance on advertising revenue has led many media outlets to prioritise sensationalism and entertainment over serious journalism.

Furthermore, the ownership structure of many media companies in India is such that they are vulnerable to economic pressures from powerful corporate interests.

Public trust in the media is a crucial element of a functioning democracy.

The rise of social media has further complicated the situation. While social media platforms have democratised access to information, they have also become breeding grounds for fake news and propaganda. □□□

[Contributed by C M Jain]

NOTE

Taxes on Billionaires

Bharat Dogra writes:

IN RECENT TIMES THERE HAVE been several well-intentioned studies and reports which strongly advocate raising more resources by imposing much higher taxes on the super-rich and billionaires. An increasing support for this was provided by the sharply escalating inequality of COVID times in which billionaires increased as never before and amassed wealth to an unprecedented extent, at the same time as more and more people were experiencing poverty, unemployment and denial of basic needs.

Sometimes this demand for higher taxes on billionaires takes the form of raising very significant sums of money that can help to create a fund dedicated to very important needs of crucial support for the poorest people or for high priority environment protection programmes. This appears very attractive but can easily also have some negative consequences.

Many, perhaps most people committed to poverty reduction and environment protection will surely like to celebrate this, particularly as there is a chance that as the wealth of the world's billionaires increases over the years, the funds available for the new special fund will also increase.

But the new situation that has been created also means that those committed to helping the poor and to environment protection have suddenly become the supporters of the billionaires, whether they admit this openly or not. In order to ensure that the big funds keep pouring in regularly into the new fund, if possible in increasing amounts, they now pray for the success of the billionaires and perhaps for their increasing numbers and increasing prosperity, because the more the wealth of the billionaires, the more the tax collected from them adds to the new fund. Hence those who were earlier the firm critics and opponents of the highly unequal and unjust systems that results in the concentration of so much wealth in the hands of a few billionaires, now become the supporters of the system in which the wealth in the hands of the billionaires continues to increase so that the fund favoured by them also continues to grow.

This criticism or caution would apply even if the new fund is administered in a just way. However in reality what is more likely is that the billionaires who contribute to this and the existing international financial institutions with all their pro-

rich, pro-inequality, status quo bias are likely to dominate the functioning of such a fund with some co-opted 'civil society' representatives having a symbolic presence.

What one would really like to avoid is a situation in which many people start saying— Oh it is the billionaires who provide most of the increased resources for helping the poor and for other essential priorities like environment protection, in the form of taxes, so let them grow faster and faster so that more and more taxes can be obtained from them. If this happens then in an awkward twist, some persons and organisations who see and position themselves as champions of equality may find themselves in a role of promoting even deeper levels of inequality and an inherently unequal pattern of development just to get some shorter-term gains.

A realisation of this possibility of falling into the trap of willy-nilly justifying the deeper inequality enhancing processes can alert genuine advocates of social and economic equality to avoid placing all their eggs in the basket of a fund based on taxing the billionaires. Instead the additional tax imposed on billionaires can go to a general pool of budgetary resources, on the understanding that the enhanced budgetary resources will be utilised in much more bountiful ways to help the poor and protect the environment. □□□

HUMRA QURAISHI'S COLUMN

Mockery of Women's Day

Humra Quraishi

WHAT'S CHANGED AFTER the gruesome murder and rape of the 31-year-old doctor in Kolkata? Rapes and sexual assaults are continuing... one after another. In the last one week news re-

ports of rape and sexual assault cases have come in from Uttarakhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra... Mind you, these are the reported cases. What about the hundreds of cases or incidents which go unreported!

Tell me, where are we heading in this state of complete perversion and utter anarchy, where no woman or child or teenager feels safe and secure. There's fear in every sense of the term. Let's not overlook a connected fact: hundreds and thousands of women and girls go missing in the country. A total of 10,61,648 women went missing from 2019 to 2021 across the country. Simultaneously,

2,51,430 girls disappeared during the same period.

Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra are the two states from where the maximum number of girls and women disappeared from 2019 to 2021. From Madhya Pradesh, 52,119 women in 2019, 52,357 in 2020 and 55,704 in 2021 went missing... In Maharashtra, 63,167 women in 2019, 58,735 in 2020 and 56,498 in 2021 went missing. A total of 90,113 girls (those who are below 18 years of age) disappeared in 2021 with the highest from West Bengal at 13,278.

Last summer, 26 July 2023, Minister of State for Home Affairs, Ajay Kumar Mishra had told the Rajya Sabha : 10,61,648 women above 18 years and 2,51,430 girls below 18 years went missing between 2019 and 2021 across the country. "In 2019, the number of girls and women who went missing was 82,084 and 3,42,168 respectively, while in 2020, 79, 233 girls and 3,44,422 women went missing".

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB): 82,619 girls went missing in 2019 and 49,436 were recovered. In the same year, 3,29,504 women went missing, and 1,68,793 were recovered. In 2020, 79,233 girls and 3,44,422 women went missing. Of these, 2,24,043 women were recovered while the number of girls recovered in 2019 was not given. "In 2021, 90,113 girls went missing and 58,980 were recovered. 3,75,058 women went missing and 2,02,298 were recovered."

WHERE WE HEADING!

Have we bothered to ponder on the

For Frontier Contact

PATIRAM BOOK STALL

College Street

dismal aspect that if this level of abuse and disappearance and sexual assaults are taking place there public domain then what must be happening in the so called 'heavily guarded places' where inmates survive within those guarded gates and high walls all around. What could be taking place in there!

Not to overlook the blatant violence unleashed on women and children during rioting and pogroms and forced shifts cum displacements. Easy targets, they are forced to keep shut about any of the sexual assaults otherwise the political goons coupled with the mafia could tear them to pieces. Several victims of sexual violence during rioting had told me they had no choice but to keep quiet for the sake of their survival and that of their families and clans.

Today, safety and security of women seems to be at the very lowest rung, with the political mafia calling the shots. Not really surprising; with all round degeneration, the vulnerable are not just targeted but ruined for times to come. Look how very helpless were the likes of National and International level champs - Sakshi Malik and Vinesh Phogat and several others. Their careers ruined, because the tainted men had to be protected under the various political guises!

And with the latest trend of bulldozing of homes, women and their entire families forced to sit or squat or stand outside their demolished dwellings. One is provoked to question: where are all those who harp on the safety of girls and women? Don't they realise that with homes and abodes demolished, entire families are forced to survive without a roof over their heads. Vulnerable they are! Yes, their vulnerability at the peak, when they are forced to sit by the road side.

And just where are the day and

night shelters where the human forms can survive? Absolutely hitting the dismal situation for those whose homes are bulldozed or where the bulldozers are parked right in front of their lanes and by-lanes.

Homeless- jobless- penniless, is perhaps the worst combination to survival in these harsh times but thousands are facing exactly this reality. Compounded by the fact that the all too powerful land and the political mafia keeps an eye on them. As though the hawks are just awaiting to pounce on the property of any of the hapless vulnerable!

In this atmosphere of political pollution, havoc continues. Instead of addressing the core issue with all its dimensions, politics takes over. It's getting nauseating to see the perverse levels we have reached, where even rapists could get some level of advantage, get going along the political slants. The stark case was that of the three rapist men accused of raping a student of IIT Varanasi. They were formally arrested only after 60 days! Why the delay when their whereabouts were well splashed? The accused men were said to be close to the top brass of the BJP! Ample photographic evidence of this had emerged, where they are seen posing with the rulers of the day! Mind you, this isn't or wasn't one of those rare cases.

Where's our collective outcry! Where are we heading in this atmosphere where the rulers of the day are playing games whilst our bodies and souls are ruptured ... hundreds amongst us getting assaulted and ruined and deadened!

And for God's sake let's get over and done with the speeches rendered by the political lot on Women's Day and on the Human Rights Day! Hollow words mean nothing at all when ground realities are worsening by the way. □□□

BOOMING GIG ECONOMY

'Prisoners on Wheels'**T Navin**

GIG ECONOMY HAS BECOME an integral part of daily lives particularly in large cities and metros of Urban India. Services related to transportation, food delivery and urban services have made the lives convenient for urban consumers and service users. Gig economy is considered to be the next happening thing where work would be based on flexibility and convenience. However, behind the booming 'gig' economy is the story of the 'gig workers'. The report titled "*Prisoners on Wheels? Report on Working and Living Conditions of App-based Workers in India*" presents this story. This is based on a survey of 10,000 gig workers from eight cities of India—Delhi, Jaipur, Indore, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Mumbai, and Kolkata. The report is about cab drivers of Ola, Uber platform and delivery workers of Swiggy and Zomato platform.

The report states that gig workers face the challenge of income instability, with earnings fluctuating widely, leading to financial uncertainties and this forces them to overwork to make ends meet. Gig workers also lack traditional employment benefits such as health insurance, retirement plans, and paid leave, which are common in more conventional jobs. Added to this is job insecurity, as gig workers have no guarantee of stable employment or regular income, making them particularly vulnerable. As "contract workers," gig workers also lack legal protections, leaving them open to exploitation without recourse to fair compensation, workplace safety, or protection from discrimination. The uncertain income and working conditions also negatively impact men-

tal health, leading to stress, anxiety, and depression.

Gig work expanded in India particularly due to availability of affordable, low skilled labour. The gig workers could be either blue-collar workers like delivery personnel and cab drivers or white-collar workers as digital marketers. As 'contract workers', they lack access to employment benefits such as minimum wages, overtime pay, severance pay, pensions, and other protections. Lack of regulation diminishes their bargaining power, and they also lack redressal mechanisms. The existing code on social security has inadequate provisions for gig workers, who are also subject to algorithmic surveillance, further eroding transparency and accountability between workers and platforms.

The sample study of cab drivers indicated that 83% work more than 10 hours daily, with 31% working over 14 hours. 43% earn less than Rs 500 per day after expenses. Most drivers (80.3%) are dissatisfied with the base fare offered. Many (66.6%) lack leisure time for their families, with 40.7% not taking a single day off per week. Sleep deprivation is prevalent, with 79.4% sleeping only 5-7 hours. Physical ailments are common, with 86.5% reporting knee, leg, foot, back, and head pains, while 98.5% experience mental health issues. Nearly half (47.1%) have faced violence at work. 83% have experienced ID blocking or deactivation, leading to financial instability. Many drivers feel that the commissions charged by companies are arbitrary, and 69% believe they should be compensated for dry runs, long pick-ups, and other job-related expenses.

BOOKS BY T VIJAYENDRA

Just Released

REQUIEM FOR OUR TIMES Rs. 100**AFTER ALL IT IS ONLY HIM!****AND OTHER STORIES** Rs. 70**AN INTELLIGENT BIRD'S GUIDE****TO THE BIRDWATCHER AND****OTHER STORIES**

Second reprint Rs. 40

THE LOSERS SHALL**INHERIT THE WORLD**

Third Reprint Rs. 60

REGAINING PARADISE:**TOWARDS A FOSSIL FUEL FREE****SOCIETY** Rs. 120**THE TEACHER AND****THE CHILD LABOUR** Rs. 50

For Copies Contact :

MANCHI PUSTAKAM

12-13-439, St. No. 1 Tarnaka,

Secunderabad 500017

Email: info@manchipustakam.in

Cell: +91 73822 97430

Delivery persons face similar challenges, with 34.4% earning less than Rs 10,000 a month after meeting expenses. The majority (89.9%) oppose the 10-minute instant delivery model as it is risky. 48.2% felt that they could not take even one day off per week. 79.5% felt that they get 5-7 hours of sleep daily. Many (49.8%) have minimal leisure time. 55% work 10-12 hours daily. 48.7% were unable to take vacations or family visits. Physical and mental health issues are prevalent. 41.5% have faced violence at work. 87% were affected by ID blocking or deactivation.

The study reveals that a majority of app-based cab drivers are young (78% aged 21-40) and predominantly male (94%). Most respondents are high school graduates (59.3%). The drivers mainly belong to nuclear, middle, or lower-middle-class families, with 61.1% supporting 3-5 family members. Hindus constitute 83.2% of the respondents, while Muslims make up 15.45%.

A significant number of drivers

work for both Ola and Uber (49.6%). Most drivers (59.3%) have been working with app-based companies for 3-5 years, and 73.8% are owner-drivers. Swift Dzire is the most common vehicle for (41.4%). 36.6% of drivers are part of a union and 63.4% yet to be unionised. The industry is dominated by young, male, married individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, with significant regional variations in employment patterns and vehicle ownership.

The study thus highlights the harsh realities faced by gig workers in India, particularly in platform-based industries. The lack of adequate labour rights and protections, coupled with challenging working conditions underscore the urgent need for comprehensive policy reforms to safeguard the interests and well-being of gig workers. The report recommends bringing improvement in the working conditions of gig workers.

The study recommends addressing the challenges faced by app-based cab drivers by focusing on improving their working conditions, earnings, and overall well-being. Key measures include treating drivers as employees and ensuring they receive at least the minimum wage for the logged in time. Until this is implemented, compensating drivers for dry runs, long pickups, time spent in traffic, idle time, customer cancellations, and income loss due to fuel price hikes is suggested. Standardising

metered fare rates and commission rates, with at least 80% of ride fare going to drivers, is also recommended. To prevent wage suppression due to oversupply, controlling the number of cars in metropolitan areas based on occupancy rates is proposed.

The report states that contracts between drivers and platforms should be simplified and made accessible in native languages, eliminating the current discriminatory and non-transparent practices. Health and safety risks, such as accidents and occupational hazards, should be mitigated by making companies liable to provide adequate insurance and benefits, as mandated by the Code on Social Security 2020. The arbitrary deactivation of drivers' IDs is stated must be addressed with a clear grievance redressal mechanism and fair hearing procedures. Regulating working hours, improving earnings, and protecting drivers from algorithmic discrimination are mentioned to be crucial. The government should ensure data transparency, sharing provisions, and data rights for workers, alongside developing strong legislation to protect gig and platform workers.

It calls for implementing the Social Security Code and establishing a grievance redressal mechanism to safeguard workers' rights. Special attention is to be given to improving working conditions for women on digital platforms, including providing access to clean public facilities and

targeted social security schemes. The government must complement progressive state measures and introduce a tripartite social dialogue system between the government, platforms, and workers' organizations to improve working conditions and wages. Access to easy and cheap credit facilities, especially for marginalized communities, are to be provided to facilitate entry into the cab-hailing industry and transition to electric vehicles.

The recommendations for improving the working conditions of app-based delivery persons emphasise treating them as employees with assured daily earnings at least equivalent to the state minimum wage.

Contracts it is stated should be simplified, made transparent, and provided in languages understood by delivery persons. Companies must make all data accessible to the government and personal data to the delivery persons. The urgent implementation of the Social Security Code and adherence to ILO Convention 102 principles are mentioned to be necessary, along with a time-bound and independent grievance redressal mechanism.

The report brings out the reality of gig workers, the challenges faced by them and calls for policy reforms to address the challenges faced by gig workers. The study based on a large sample size is a must-read to understand the status of gig workers. □□□

[Author: T Navin is an independent writer.cointercurrents.org]

'LAPATA LADIES'

In Search of the Lost Girls

Partha Sarathi

RECENTLY, KIRAN RAO'S movie *Lapata Ladies* raised a few very important questions—why and how girls in India became 'lapata' (i.e. lost or un-

traceable)? Can't women in this country survive without depending on men? In the beginning of the story, the audience found two married girls becoming 'lapata', when

their husbands were swapped while they were travelling in a train to their in-law's house. One of the girls could detect this error after getting down in the railway station and took refuge there herself; while the second girl, in her own volition, proceeded with the 'wrong' husband, as she grasped the first opportunity to get rid of the bondage called

September 8-14, 2024

FRONTIER

7

marriage. She was determined to pursue the study of organic farming, but due to mounting family pressure, was forced to get married.

The purpose of reviewing the movie is to discuss the question of lost girls in India, to initiate a conversation on how and why women get lost in the society. Not that the girls in this country are lost only in the institution called marriage, there are hundreds of other avenues for their being lost. Millions of girls are killed right in the wombs of the mothers, hundreds of newborn girls ended up in garbage dumps; thousands of young girls are trafficked to far-away places. But the most common way of Indian girls getting lost is probably the marriage institution. Also, they get lost for remaining unmarried, for being widowed or divorced, in which instances the society begins to lament how they would survive without the guardianship of a man. In the movie, *Lapata Ladies*, a lady running a tea-stall in the railway station quipped, 'after a lot of thinking, I have concluded that the women don't at all need men for their survival. Only thing is that they must learn to stand on their own feet.'

But the society goes on chanting that women cannot survive without relying on men, echoing the teaching of *Manusmriti* that for sustenance women must depend on their parents in childhood, on their husbands in youth, and on their sons in old age. This view is so deep-rooted in the society that most women also believe in this proposition. And that is why they almost unconditionally accept the age-old practice of marriage which is highly discriminating and humiliating. In fact, the society compels girls to enter the labyrinthine of marriage, knowing well that they would hardly come out unscathed.

People are so habituated in witnessing girls losing their indepen-

dence, their identity, their right to pursue their lives in their own way, once they enter the system called marriage that one never notices the consequences they suffer. Here, one would like to examine in brief how marriage begets a process to slowly devour the self of a woman as a human being.

Presently, girls are getting more educated than boys and relentlessly striving to earn a living. But whatever qualification a girl achieves, or earns, her family and the surrounding society become restive about her marriage as she grows up. This writer faced the first question from one of his comrades: 'When you are going to arrange your girl's marriage?' But what is the point in arranging her marriage at all? She is an adult and would decide her marriage on her own. If she doesn't feel like, she won't. Hearing these arguments, the comrade became embarrassed and left. So, this is the state of mind of people in the society. Even people with left orientation and so-called radicals also harbour the notion that for girls, marriages have to be arranged.

Noticeably, the society does not bother much if a man remains unmarried throughout his life, while the presence of an unmarried girl in the house becomes a headache for all. Even if her parents are unwilling to get her married against her will, all the relatives, friends, office colleagues and neighbours would poke into the individual choice of the girl. According to scriptures, a daughter is a liability for the parents, a burden for the family. Alas, the parents of today's society cannot yet feel free from this burden.

In highly educated families, one may find instances of not treating girls as a burden; but even in this writer's own family, educated relatives are becoming anxious about daughter's marriage. And the daughter too has to frequently face the

FRONTIER

44, Balaram 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.	1000
Life Subscription [Inland]	Rs.	5000+

Make payment by Cheque/Draft
in favour of

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: CBININBBICAL

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: UTBIINBBOBC

OR

**FRONTIER (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: UTBIINBBOBC

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

To

FRONTIER

C/o Durbar Mahila Samanawya Committee

44, Balaram Dey Street, Kolkata-700006

West Bengal, Contact : 8240016324

same question, 'When are you getting married?' Incidentally, she is a schoolteacher, self-reliant and freedom-loving, but the society at large cares very little about the freedom and independence of a girl.

In truth women's rights have little place in all high-sounding discussions about human rights. This fight for women's freedom is a difficult one, and it is essentially the women's fight. The society needs to be shaken repeatedly to make it realise that women are also human beings (more human than men, as they possess more human quality). The country needs millions of girls like the second one in the movie *Lapata Ladies*, who are ready to tread a long path to fulfil their dreams, overcoming all obstacles on the way. They, only they, would be able to force the society to accept that the women should have all the rights that men enjoy.

Why in this 21st century a girl will have to stay in the in-law's house, accept an unfamiliar house as her own home, accept the husband's parents as her own, maintain distance from her own family, change her surname and be known in husband's surnames, put vermilion on her forehead and wear white bangles to advertise her marriage status? In normal life, when some-

one is evicted from his/her home, the person breaks down in rage and protests in tears and the society boils against injustice. But when a girl is ousted from her home before one's very eyes and forced to leave her near and dear ones in tears, the society remains indifferent. Isn't it a crime to force the girls to wipe off their self-identity at a stroke, and leave their childhood abode along with all companions and memories?

Human life not only requires food and clothes. In the serfdom, slaves were just provided food-shelter and clothes against their labour. Even today some so-called 'Bhadralok' (civilised) families keep small children in their home for menial work in lieu of food and shelter. Similarly, in the traditional marriage system, the 'swami' (husband), literally meaning owner, takes the responsibility of providing food and clothes to a girl, who in return has to look after not only her husband, but all her in-laws, prepare food for them, conceive child (children) and raise them and bear thousand other responsibilities—all for the husband's family. Even an earning girl, who is not dependent on her husband for food and clothes, is compelled by social conditions to perform all the duties in her in-laws' house.

Now if one accepts that human civilisation is destined from slavery towards freedom, how do people accept the unfreedom of women as so natural? The entity of a human being is shaped by one's own family and local environment—her/his friends and companions, studies and education, social and cultural milieu and numerous other factors. In this process, the senses of self-identity, self-respect, individual rights and values flourish like hundred flowers in one's psyche slowly bit by bit. Then all of a sudden, one day she is compelled to enter an institution called marriage, which instantly robs

her of self-identity. What could be a more severe punishment than stripping one of her own identities?

In today's reality, a few educated married girls could live outside the house of their in-laws because of her or her husband's workplace. They are to some extent spared from the ordeals faced by the married women, staying in the confinement of their in-law's house. Obviously not many have this opportunity. When a girl chooses her own partner, she gets some opportunity to understand the partner, but she remains unacquainted with or may dislike the partner's family. Yet society would advise her to regard the in-laws' house as her own, adjust with a different family, a different milieu with different cultural settings and different values. This amounts to sacrificing everything of her own and becoming subservient. For economically dependent girls, society leaves almost no other option open, and they could not even think of getting rid of the bondage, namely marriage, however unbearable it becomes for them.

This is the heritage and culture. In this country, the system of marriage is a fine process of gender-suppression, in which the pains and agonies of a girl are covered up under the huge pomp and splendors of festivities and ceremonies. And then, if one finds the quiet and gentle girl, under the pressure of marriage, begins quarrelling with her husband, pressing to get separated from her in-laws, leading to strained relationship with them, the society squarely blames the girl. Then if she bears a child, she gets more entangled—which is a matter of separate discussion. One needs to have separate discussions on the problems of girls who are not married, who refuse to get married and who are separated divorced or widowed. In fact, the problems of women are so multi-

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

faceted and so neglected that once one starts delving into them, there seems no end.

And then, if persons belonging to Hindu and Muslim religion decide to become partners for life, or two same-sex individuals, male or female, decide to live together, then

the marriage as an institution becomes extremely vulnerable. Practically, this marriage system is still highly influenced by religious values, and probably no region on earth is based on the modern concepts of human rights. Thus, whatever modernity people show overtly, be vo-

cal about equality, freedom and democracy, they have to walk a long way to become modern and democratic if considered in the context of women liberty. □□□

[Translated from a Bengali article, published in Manushi Kotha, Year 8, Number 11, 2024]

RS 5 CRORE BOUNTY

Reward-carrying Maoists or Civilians?

Malini Subramaniam

DEEP INSIDE THE FORESTS of Bastar in southern Chhattisgarh, Maoist insurgents drawn from local Adivasi communities have been locked in a low-intensity war with the state for nearly four decades. This year, Chhattisgarh police claim to have made a major breakthrough in the conflict, killing 141 Maoists in 38 encounters, higher than any annual tally seen in the past, barring 2009.

She lay on the ground with her head turned sideways, nose and mouth bloodied, eyes partially open. The dead woman in the photograph, according to a press statement of the Chhattisgarh police, was Sanni alias Sundri of Vattekal village, a member of company number six of the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army, the armed wing of the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist).

The statement said she was among six Maoists killed during a gunfight between the security forces and the insurgents in the forests near Gobel village in Narayanpur district on June 7.

According to the police, she was no ordinary Maoist—she had a bounty on her head. Any security personnel who killed her was entitled to receive a reward of Rs 8 lakh from the state.

But at her home in Vattekal village, the woman's father, Ishwar Kumeti, denied his daughter was a Maoist.

Showing her Aadhaar card and Ayushman Bharat health insurance card issued by the government, Kumeti said his daughter's name was Manbati Kumeti, not Sanni. Most knew her by her nickname, Kaari, he said. She was 23 when she died.

Kaari's brother Balku Kumeti, who works as a mid-day meal cook in the village's primary school, said she was home on the morning of June 7 when news that the security forces were approaching the village set off a wave of panic. Everyone, except breastfeeding women, infants and the elderly, fled into the forest – a common response in villages falling in the Maoist-dominated areas in southern Chhattisgarh, where Adivasi villagers fear reprisals from state forces on suspicion that they are providing support to the insurgents.

While others came back to the village by the evening of June 7, Kaari did not. On June 8, the police released photographs of six bodies, which they claimed were of the Maoists killed in the encounter. Five bodies were in uniform. The sixth was not. This woman in a chequered shirt was Kaari, to her family's shock.

"When I went to claim her body along with my father, we told the senior officers present that they had made a mistake," said Baliram Kumeti, a second brother of Kaari. "But the officers insisted she was a

Maoist." He said the Narayanpur superintendent of police told them "he will look into the matter."

Meanwhile, police superintendent Pushkar Sharma dismissed the family's allegation. He said all bodies had been identified by surrendered Maoists from the area who were familiar with the cadres and could be trusted to accurately identify them.

The list of the names and photographs released by the police mentioned the reward amount for each of those killed. The total came to Rs 38 lakh, with the individual bounties ranging from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 8 lakh.

"The size of the reward is based on the seniority of rank and the profile of the individual in the party," Sharma explained.

When a Maoist surrenders to the police, he or she is given the reward as rehabilitation assistance, the superintendent said. But when a Maoist is killed in a security operation, "the reward is distributed among the team that went into the operation". There is no reward for arresting a Maoist. "That is part of our regular duties," he said.

Asked if this creates an incentive for the police to kill Maoists in cold blood as opposed to arresting them and bringing them to justice, Sharma said the reward is distributed among a large number of security personnel and often the individual share comes to a negligible amount. "On paper it may appear to be a large amount, but when shared with a large team it is a very small amount, hardly an incentive," he said.

Bastar Inspector General of Police, Pattilingam Sundarraj, echoed this view. "No one makes a fortune by conducting anti-Naxal operations and neutralising Maoists," he said. Giving rewards for successful anti-Maoist operations is an old policy, he pointed out. Besides, the money is distributed to the "core team" involved in the operation only after a committee has "scrutinised every aspect of the operation, including the medical reports and magisterial enquiry reports".

Asked how many personnel in total had participated in the June 7 anti-Maoist operation, Narayanpur police superintendent Sharma refused to reveal the number, citing security reasons. The Inspector General, too, declined to specify how many personnel were usually part of a "core team".

This lack of transparency is worrying.

This year, Chhattisgarh Police claims to have killed 141 Maoists in 38 encounters in the Bastar region—the highest annual tally in decades. Many of those killed had bounties

on their heads. The reward money for these adds up to Rs 5.42 crore. The total amount is likely to be higher since information was not available for 10 encounters.

Have the bounties skewed the way security operations are conducted and led to questionable killings?

Rekawaya gram panchayat lies at the intersection of the three districts of Narayanpur, Bijapur and Dantewada. The Indravati River flows through the thickly forested area. Boats made of hollowed out trees transport people across the river from Bijapur's Bhairamgarh block, barring in the summer, when it is possible to wade through its rocky, shallow parts.

This is what some of the security personnel did on May 23, as part of a security operation called "Operation Jal Shakti".

Although Rekawaya comes under the jurisdiction of Narayanpur's Orchha block and police station, it was Dantewada district police that took credit for the operation.

According to a press statement released by the police on May 24, eight bodies of uniformed Maoists as well as seven weapons had been recovered after the end of the operation that lasted 72 hours. The statement said some people suspected of planting explosive devices to target the security forces had also been detained.

The same day, villagers sent a handwritten note to Adivasi leader Soni Sori, who lives in Dantewada. It listed the names of 40 people who they said had been detained by the police.

Later, the police released a list of the names and photographs of those killed in the encounter, mentioning the amount of reward money each of them carried, which came to a total of Rs 31 lakh.

Two men on the police's list of the eight dead Maoists, however,

also featured in the villagers' handwritten note as among the 40 civilians detained by the police.

Of the Rs 5.29 crore given to security personnel as reward money, one encounter alone accounts for Rs 1.85 crore. It took place in the forests of Chhote Bethiya in Kanker district on April 16. The police claim it was the most successful anti-Maoist operation till date since the security forces managed to kill 29 Maoists, the highest number in a single strike so far.

While Rs 1.78 crore was announced as the reward money for the Chhote Bethiya killings, another Rs 7.55 lakh was given as reward for recovering weapons and other equipment.

In the villages of the dead Maoists, however, the families of many of those killed said they were unarmed cadres who had joined the People's Liberation Guerilla Army less than a year ago.

One such case was that of 21-year-old Sunila Madkam.

Sunila Madkam's mother Sukdi said Sunila was the third among her six children. She studied in a government primary school till Class 3 but dropped out after the nearest middle school moved 60 km away to Orchha block headquarters.

Last year, after spending some time hanging around Maoist cadres, Sunila and her young friends, Sithal Mandavi, Sheela Kunjam, Geeta Kunjam, and Pintu Oyam, decided to formally join the People's Liberation Guerilla Army. They did this in August, soon after the sowing season ended, her mother said.

Sunila last came home in the second week of March, after her maternal grandmother passed away. "I told her to be home, but she said she would visit home as and when she can and left," the mother recalled.

Barely a month later, Sunila died in the April 16 encounter. Four of her friends, all of whom were recent

WOMEN AND CYCLE IN INDIA

**Joy, Mobility, Freedom
and Empowerment**

Author: Bicycle and Women Collective

Editor: Karnika Palwa

Production: Hema Vaishnavi

Price: Rs 80

Copy Left: All Rights Reversed
Publishers: Ecologise Hyderabad
110, Ramanaiah Apartments,
Road No. 2, Jyoti Colony,
Secunderabad-500026,
Telangana, India

Email: t.vijayendra@gmail.com

Mobile: +91 94907 05634

For Copies:

MANCHI PUSTAKAM

12-13-439, St. No. 1

Tarnaka, Secunderabad 500017

Email: info@manchipustakam.in

Mobile: +91 73822 97430

Maoist recruits, were also killed. While one of them was identified by the police as a Maoist carrying a reward of Rs 2 lakh, the others, including Sunila, were shown to be Maoists carrying rewards of Rs 8 lakh each.

In the eight months she spent in the Maoist armed wing, Sunila “could not have done anything to earn such a reward,” her brother said.

At Sheela Kunjam’s home in Bhairamgarh’s Utlā village, her father, Jogu Kunjam, also reacted with a sense of disbelief to the police claims—the young people were recent recruits, he pointed out, and had barely done anything to be considered reward-worthy by the police.

But the families of Sunila and the other young Maoist cadres say they have reason to believe that the killings did not happen in the heat of the moment—they suspect the young cadres had been tortured before being shot dead.

When they went to Kanker to collect the bodies, they were shocked to see the nature of the injuries, Sunila’s brother said. Barring Pintu Oyam, who had a gunshot wound on his forehead, the others had injuries on their heads, hands and thighs that appeared to be wounds from being hit with heavy objects like stones, he alleged.

Sundarraaj disputed these allegations: “Our jawans will not do that and are not trained to do so. The

dead are respected, even if they are Maoists.” He claimed that the Maoists have, on several occasions, defaced and mutilated the bodies of security personnel.

In a statement released two days after the Chhote Bethiya encounter, the CPI (Maoist) acknowledged that all 29 killed were Maoist cadres. But the statement claimed that other cadres who had managed to escape the encounter had revealed that only 12 people had been shot during the gunfight. The rest, the Maoist statement alleged, had been rounded up, made to walk two kilometres to a memorial erected by the Maoists, where they were tortured and killed.

□□□

[Source: Scroll.in]

RECALLING A CLASSIC

PAAR 40

Harsh Thakor

THIS YEAR, ON 21ST MAY, film lovers commemorated the 40th anniversary of movie PAAR. It is a 1984 Hindi film directed by Goutam Ghose, with Naseeruddin Shah and Shabana Azmi playing central roles. Based on the original Bengali story ‘Paari’ by Samaresh Basu, the film is based on a Dalit couple compelled to vacate their village after a massacre and their ordeal and quest for homecoming. In the film Goutam Ghose added new muscles to the storyline.

PAAR is a defining work in Indian Parallel Cinema and can be compared with the works of greats like Mrinal Sen and Shyam Benegal.

In the history of Indian cinema, few films have so poignantly or illustratively captured the tumours of injustice ingrained in Indian society and how it shapes people’s lives. It is one of the most sensitive and heart-breaking portrayals of the oppressed confronting agony or adversity, and

how such circumstances shape their lives. The plight of the down-trodden, being crushed by the local and state politicians touches the viewer in the very core of the soul.

PAAR is an illustrative reflection of the exploitation rampant in rural India, combined with the evils of the caste system, lack of land reforms, and the brutality of the social order working hand in glove with the oppressors. It is a most realistic and uncompromising portrayal of the bondage of rural or Dalit poor being at the mercy of an oppressive society. Most intrinsically it captures the psyche of people in feudal society and how they revolve around the feudal system.

It is very relevant even in this day and age, with Brahmanical tyranny at an ascendancy, being rampant every rung of society, and caste massacres, a predominant feature in villages. This writer would love PAAR being resurrected in an appropriate

form today, in the age of globalisation, when economic disparity has escalated to levels unparalleled.

The film portrays how suffering can bring out the best in people or tap energy to new heights. as well as how battling adversity in oppressive order spurs spiritual transformation within people.

The narrative was based in the background in Bihar, a state that had started experiencing great social unrest and be the scenario of several massacres from the late 1980s through the early 2000s, similar to the one depicted in the film. It captured how in the very heart of society the upper caste landlords and their henchmen morally governed the society, placing Dalit and lower caste peasantry under their yoke.

The film received great ovation, winning several national and international awards. Naseeruddin Shah won a Volpi Cup for his performance at the Venice film festival.

Ghose contrives a plot for Naurangia and Rama to leave their village and establishes how and why they were trapped. The schoolmaster (Anil Chatterjee), who had helped

Naurangia and his ilk confront the injustices of their landlord (Utpal Dutt), has died in a suspicious road accident. Seeking revenge, Naurangia and three others murder the zamindar's aggressive brother (Mohan Agashe). . The zamindar's men set the village ablaze forcing Naurangia and Rama to flee into the night. In spite of misgivings, being deceived and low on luck, there was still been some energy in their reserves to battle in the doldrums, but now there was hunger and untold despair.

A journey triggered by circumstances and not out of choice leads them to landing on the footpaths of Kolkata. After serious efforts to find sustenance elsewhere, the two decide to return home. To earn the fare, they agree to drive the herd of pigs through the river.

The job that appears is a terrifying task which only the most merciful can offer and which only the

desperate can accept. They nearly drown before reaching safety. At the conclusion of the exhaustive journey, Naurangia receives their payment. As they lie exhausted at night, Rama suddenly realises that the baby has been, too silent and starts to panic Naurangia places his ear to her belly and listens to the heartbeats of the unborn baby.

Most commendable that the film has no vulgarity, extravagant costumes or artificiality. It has the character of the Brechtian realism.

Ghose's eye for poetic imagery led to several visually capturing scenes. The massacre of the labourers takes place in the shell of darkness, and their confusion and fear are depicted by flashes of torchlight. Ghose used low-speed film stock to create atmosphere as well as project the lack of adequate lighting in the village.

Ghose's scenario, music, photog-

raphy and direction make *PAAR* simply a mystifying experience like very few films.

The body language of defeat is stark in its projection that voices defeat noiselessly. However, when the time comes to transport the pigs, the same defeated bodies are spurred for a desperate bid fight for survival. The conclusion when Rama's child is still alive in the stomach symbolises hope over despair.

Anil Chatterjee is brilliant in portraying rebellious spirit against injustice, by giving impetus to the self identity of oppressed farmers and labourers.

Om Puri, as Ram Naresh, in a crafty, nuanced manner, enacts the Dalit Village Head who won the Panchayat elections, thereby offending the rich and powerful. □□□

[Harsh Thakor is freelance journalist. Thanks for information from Nandini Ramnath in Film Flashback in Scroll, Movie Mahal and Art House Cinema.]

POINT OF VIEW

A 'Revolutionary Verdict'

Balakrishna Ganeshan

THE SUPREME COURT IN A landmark judgement recently upheld the state governments' power to create sub-classification within the reserved categories for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The judgement has brought to the surface, the fault lines that exist within the community. While the Chamars of Uttar Pradesh and Mahars of Maharashtra have been opposing the sub-classification, the Valmikis of Uttar Pradesh, Madigas from Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, and Arunthathiyars have come in support of the court's verdict.

One of the case studies which the judgement relied on was 'The Many Omissions of a Concept: Discrimination amongst Scheduled Castes' by Ravichandran Bathran,

which establishes the heterogeneity amongst the Dalit communities.

Bathran converted to Islam in 2022, and is now known as Mohammed Raees. He belongs to the Chakkiliyar community. His mother was a former manual scavenger. He is also the founder of independent media organisation *Dalit Camera*. Though he is a postdoctoral fellow in the University of Southampton, South Africa, he engages in sanitation work, cleaning septic tanks and asserting that there is dignity in the line of work.

Ever since the judgement was delivered, Raees has been advocating that the judgement would lead to uplift of marginalised communities within the SC fold. Terming the judgement "revolutionary", Raees said that

he welcomes it. According to Raees the judgement is anti-caste and would lead to elimination of discrimination even among the Dalit communities. The sub-classification within the reserved categories will help provide representation to hitherto underrepresented groups like the Valmikis, Maangs, Mathangs, Madigas (state) in academia and jobs.

Raees said that the sub-classification will have an impact on academia and jobs, where currently people from castes like Valmikis are absent. "It is an anti-caste judgement. In academia and jobs, Valmikis of UP are not there, and there is violence committed against them," he said. Raees bemoans that among the Dalits nobody speaks about manual scavenging and addresses their issues.

A tall leader from the Dalit community, former CM Mayawati, had opposed the judgement arguing that the sub-classification would lead to

divisions amongst the community. She said that while earlier only the Parliament was empowered to include or exclude any caste or tribe from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, now any party, which is in power, can give “unfair advantage” of reservation to their preferred caste groups for creating vote banks.

Raees says that the judgement calls for annihilation of caste even among Dalits. “The judgement acknowledges that there is discrimination within Dalits. Do all the SC’s sit and dine together? No. We are already divided. Let Mayawati or Chandrashekhar Azad Ravan give data proving this wrong.” “Instead of just maintaining a brotherly relationship, Dalit communities should stop practising endogamy and support intermarriage between various groups,” he said.

Rahul Sonpimple, founder-president of All India Independent Scheduled Castes Association (AIISCA), criticised the apex court’s judgement, saying it was based on a hypothesis and there is no actual data about caste groups and the violence they face. There is no empirical evidence

to suggest the ‘dominance’ of certain SC communities officially, he said.

Reacting to the criticism, Raees said, “There is a Usha Mehra committee report on SCs in Andhra Pradesh. There are reports from Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Haryana as well. These reports have proved the dominance of certain communities in jobs. This argument is a diversion. Chamars and Mahars have been dominant in the political field too.”

“How many Valmiki MPs are there? In Tamil Nadu, there are five Paraiyar MPs, two Pallar MPs and only one Chakkiliyar MP, that too a nominated one. We are not underrepresented, you are taking away our opportunities by contesting in our areas,” Raees said.

Mayawati has asked the Supreme Court to reconsider its verdict. “Irrespective of the judgement, the Dalit leaders need to acknowledge the violence against certain Dalit communities,” he said.

Raees said while Dalit leaders in North India have disagreed with the judgement, political parties in the south have welcomed it. “Nobody opposed the judgement from Tamil Nadu because of the progressive

politics followed here due to the Dravidian movement. It is a land with ideology. Apart from Kanshiram and Dalit Panthers movement, there is no ideology to root out caste in North Indian states. But in the Dravidian land there is a strong anti-caste movement including in Telangana.”

Raees, while thanking the judgement for creating an anti-caste discourse in the mainstream, said he wants the government to ensure that a certain number of people from within the Dalit community is represented in all spheres.

When asked about the concerns regarding a large number of posts reserved for SCs and STs remaining unfilled because of ‘suitable candidates’ not being found and the impact of sub-classification on already skewed representation, Raees said, “This is a long-standing issue. But only when the sub-classification issue comes up do they cite this? When have all the Dalits come together to fight against this earlier? Has there been any movement? Even now there is no movement. All they ask is for the sub-classification to be withdrawn.” □□□

TWO SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

Religion didn’t Produce Philosophy

Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd

HISTORICALLY THERE were two streams of philosophical discourses in the world, more particularly in India: The first one was the philosophy of people, who were involved in production—agrarian, artisanal, animal economy and so on. The second one was the philosophy of saints, sadhus and sanyasis, who always remained outside production and lived for their own self-salvation. The idea of self-salvation was related to the post-life imagination of

the well-being of a person in heaven. This heavenly life was/is totally imaginary. To continue to live here on this earth one has to eat on a daily basis. For that human beings have to labour. Both hunting and producing food from the earth involved labour. The saints, sadhus and sanyasis always remained away from labour, but continued to eat food that was a byproduct of labour. When both, while hunting and producing food, human beings had to create new ideas on a daily basis as

well. The human philosophy of life took shape at this stage itself.

In India, the idea of self-salvation has taken such a route that it moulded a self-salvational social group that has become a caste in itself. This is where the idea of Brahmin evolved. It also had an idea of rebirth in caste and family where they get good food without working on the land. They negated land and labour relationships as negative. This mode of thinking constructed a second mode of philosophical thinking. Unlike in the rest of the world anti-production and anti-labour philosophy took a deeper root in what they call the Vedic period.

The first type of philosophical idea of life remained mostly unwrit-

ten and carried through oral transmission from generation to generation. This one may call the philosophy of production and reproduction. Unlike among animals among human beings production and reproduction of humans themselves were/are inter-related. The human factor of labour was/is an inherent process in production and reproduction. The first school always recognised how production is a source of life and how labour enhances human reproduction abilities so that life continues to exist.

Without the existence of the first school, there is no life in the second school. The people who lived in the realm of the second school of thought were/are parasites, totally dependent on the first school for improved food and housing. Unfortunately, the second school had written and codified ideas and treated the philosophy of production as mean. Because of the life of leisure, anti-labour and anti-production, the second school could construct a book-based philosophy and started controlling the food producers. That thought was transferred through written texts, at least for a period of three thousand years or so, from one generation to another within their small community and treated the production force as unworthy of respect. This destroyed the country's potential to advance by using its full potential of labour and knowledge. There is a total disconnect between the two schools now.

The food and goods producers were philosophically engaged with nature as a source of ideas, imagination and concepts. But the saints and sadhus were self-centered and their knowledge was purely perceptual without connecting itself to creative experiments. They never engaged with nature as a multiplier of resources. Nature constantly reproduces itself. As parts of it keep dying

and its rebirth takes place at the same place. Those who are constantly engaged with nature understand birth, death and rebirth is a constant process in nature. They observed nature for millennia while living as part of it, without the ability to connect between nature and an unseen force, what later was called God. Abstraction of an idea from the material process was happening around human beings and this was a much later development.

The earliest philosophical imagination of God was formulated in the production fields only after domesticated plant and seed production—what was called agriculture—developed.

Understanding God and depending on the belief that God was with them here in this life and afterlife came into human belief in the process of struggle for food. After all, the basic human life sustains with food. A child needs food to survive and grow before the child thinks about the environment around him. The idea of God among children is a social construct, not an individual imagination. The child does not start their life praying to God but it starts life by drinking mother's milk. Baby animals also start living in the same way that human babies start by drinking milk from their mother's udder. A thinker who believes in an idea that God is first and the idea of food is later, would say that God created that early impulse among all babies to go to mother's udder or breast and drink milk both among animals and humans. But the idea of God does not exist in the child's mind in the same way that it does not exist in any animal, baby, or adult. The idea of God came into human life when human consciousness had grown and became complicated.

Not only human beings, but animals also need food during their whole living period, they do not have the idea of God. The idea of God was/is a

philosophical one, which also goes along with the idea of the creation of the entire universe. Before any written text—Bible, Quran, or Rig Veda about God—human beings who were engaged with nature encountered dangers, uncertainties, fear and anxiety. However, the fear of death, which was/is common to both humans and animals, was taking away many fellow beings living and working with others who were still alive. Such a complex idea of death forced them to believe that there was/is unknown and unseen power, which they thought, was responsible for the death. This search for an unknown power began a second major revolution in human existence after the first major revolution of producing food under their control from the land and seed relationship.

The living people talked about God as the cause for all those things happening. In the search for the causation of happenings, when the visible answer was not found, they concluded that there was an invisible force, operating to create all such conditions. In truth the whole search for things started with their search for food in the beginning. Then they searched for causation of human death and sorrows as they began to grow more and more conscious about their being. They discovered the God who could not be seen and touched. All this happened before the Aryans arrived in this land, India.

They asked for God's blessings much before the written books came into existence when they were ridden with fear, anxiety, disease and so on. They must have thought that support was needed for having a safe living, for living better and for continuing their labour as a source of life. If they cannot go to work with diseases because of fear or of hunger, not just one adult who fall sick, but the children around the

working person—man or woman—would die. The strength to labour was far more important to procure or producing food. Fear of the future and the source of energy to labour in a powerful nature made them think and rethink for solace. To some extent, such solace came from the idea of God.

That invisible support would give better results in the fields, at home (after humans built a house) and in

the fields of production and food gathering. The idea of God is a civil societal idea, not an individual idea. Gradually that idea took the shape of religion. However, religion was not the source of philosophy. Religion used philosophy for its hegemonic role in later years. In India, the Vedic religion used the idea of God by those who never were willing to work in the fields of production for mobilisation of food and life

resources to constantly control and exploit people who worked and produced food. In other words it was labour that discovered God, not the anti-labour saint or saadhu. Once the idea of God took root, philosophy grew around it in a much more complicated way. Religion is a by-product of this complication. □□□

[Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd is a political theorist, social activist and author.countercurrents.org]

LETTERS

Citizenship Crisis in Assam

For those caught in the relentless grip of the NRC process and facing the threat of losing their citizenship, the experience is nothing short of life-altering, leaving scars that linger long after the verdict. CJP has been acutely attuned to this reality since the inception of Team Assam over five years ago. Our approach extends beyond offering crucial legal aid in foreigners' tribunals and courts. The CJP team engages in dialogue, counseling, and delivers both paralegal and direct legal counsel to those in need. This is how we endeavor to mitigate the hardships faced by individuals caught in the upheaval of the citizenship crisis. In a significant ruling, the Supreme Court of India has overturned wrongful decisions by the Gauhati High Court and the Foreigner's Tribunal, declaring Md. Rahim Ali an Indian citizen. CJP has been tirelessly advocating for individuals like Ali who are facing the citizenship crisis in Assam. Our relentless efforts have recently led to victories for elderly couples Mazam Ali & Saleya Bibi, Sher Ali & Jamila Khatun, and migrant worker Anjuma Bibi, all of whom are now declared Indian citizens. CJP's Team Assam steadfastly aids those in the citizenship crisis, conducting 20-40 weekly coun-

seling sessions. Despite the dire situation and over 29 suicides since 2017, we persist. In 2023, we saved 18 from statelessness, building a strong support network with communities and advocates. In 2023, Assam's Foreigners' Tribunals declared 18 individuals as Indian citizens. But what's the secret behind this success? Meet CJP's Team Assam: their determination, authentic documentation, compelling statements, and crucial witness testimonies made it happen! How do you get a detainee released from Assam's infamous Detention Camps? CJP provides a step-by-step answer.

CJP Team Assam Countless Jobs?

While addressing the nation on the occasion of Independence Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said on August 15 that doors of opportunities are wide open for the Indian youth around the world and after eluding for so many years after independence, countless new employment opportunities are now at their doorstep.

As PM Modi asserted that there are countless employment opportunities, several reports, including the India Employment Report of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) cautions policymakers about increasing unemployment rate in the country, particularly among youth.

Earlier this week, the ILO's Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024 report had said that youngsters across the world are unable to find secure work and their chances of finding a job decrease as the income level of the country they reside in decreases.

The opposition too has been targeting the Centre over increase in unemployment rate and the unavailability of statistics related to employment figures.

The National Statistical Office of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation would earlier release employment and unemployment surveys till 2011-12. But since 2017, the Periodic Labour Force Surveys (PLFS) replaced the Employment and Unemployment surveys.

The first PLFS found that the unemployment rate for educated males in rural areas, between 2004-05 and 2011-12, ranged from 3.5 and 4.4% which increased to 10.5% during 2017-18.

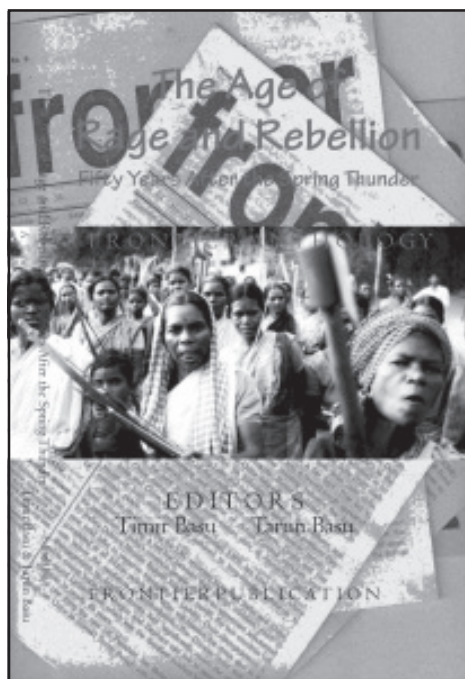
Similarly, for educated rural females, unemployment rate ranged from 9.7 to 15.2% between 2004-05 and 2011-12 which increased to 17.3% in 2017-18.

For educated males living in urban areas, the unemployment rate ranged from 3.6 to 5.1% between 2004-05 and 2011-12 which increased to 9.2% during 2017-18.

A Reader

A **frontier** Publication

Just Released



THE AGE OF RAGE AND REBELLION: 50 YEARS AFTER THE SPRING THUNDER

[Price: INR 300+ 100 for postage]

(An anthology of articles and interviews published in frontier to commemorate and re-assess the Naxalbari uprising)

Editors:

Timir Basu and Tarun Basu

Contributors: Santosh Rana, Debabrata Panda, Arup Baisya, Farooque Chowdhury, Jan Myrdal, Harsh Thakor, Bernard D'Mello, Timir Basu, Gautam Navlakha, Lawrence Lifschultz, Ranabir Samaddar, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Nazes Afroz, Subhendu Dasgupta, Sumanta Banerjee, Varavara Rao, Ramachandra Guha, Dipanjan Raychowdhuri, Alope Mukherjee, T Vijayendra, Mallikarjuna Sharma and Nirmal Brahmachari

Available at: FRONTIER Office and PATIRAM STALL (College Street) MANISHA, DHAYNBINDU (College Square) and other book stalls selling regular issues of frontier.