

# frontier

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## A 'Frozen' Conflict

INDIA-CHINA BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP IS AGAIN GETTING CURRENT because the persons in power, barring Prime Minister Modi, of course, are expressing their concerns in no uncertain terms about this more than six decades old frozen conflict in the Himalayas. There is nothing new in India's strained relations with China and New Delhi's official response to Chinese stance. What started in 1962 as hot war was transformed into cold war immediately after cessation of hostilities along the disputed border or what they call Line of Actual Control [LAC]. Both sides have been duelling over the disputed boundary since then without showing any sincerity to get rid of the crisis once and for all. While participating in a discussion at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar admitted that 'the relationship between the two countries is very complex'. It's one way to bypass the issue and talk vaguely to suppress the ground reality. He also emphasised on peace along the border for normal ties. In other words his indirect admittance that India-China relationship is abnormal despite the fact that billionaires on both sides of the 'shifting fence' are too eager to do trade. In truth India and America are two largest importers of Chinese goods.

Not that they are not conducting military-level talks, rather 'disengagement' talks, but the end result is zero. It's more like an arrangement to buy breathing space for engagement, not disengagement. They have been discussing 'disengagement' process without really creating any conducive atmosphere for withdrawal of troops to their original positions. So after each military-level parley it is business as usual.

Meanwhile, against the backdrop of the border stand-off with China, leader of Opposition in Parliament Rahul Gandhi said 'Prime Minister Modi has not handled the situation well'. He has gone to the extent of accusing Modi of allowing China to occupy land the size of Delhi in Ladakh. But China still thinks they have not yet been able to reclaim the territory they have been claiming since 1962. As so many rounds of military-level negotiations have failed to resolve the dispute, they seem to have decided to regain their control by pushing the LAC to their advantage, sometimes resulting in losses of lives. After all LAC is not the permanent and settled boundary; it varies according to each one's own perception.

For one thing Modi never criticised China in public for its alleged forward policy. On the contrary he assured the Nation that his government didn't

concede any Indian parcel of land to China. This bitter legacy left by history cannot be erased so easily. However, Rahul Gandhi didn't utter a word or two about why successive Congress regimes failed to clinch a deal with China.

So long as Tibet was Tibet there was no border problem. Indians and Tibetans used to move freely without bothering about undemarcated 'international border'. It all started when Tibet became an integral part of China, with the huge incursion of

Chinese troops in Tibet and destruction of Tibet's semi-independent status which it used to enjoy before communists took power in Beijing.

Two parallel lines never meet. China has not budged an inch from its stated stand on the disputed territory since 1962. They are unlikely to change their position in foreseeable future. China has repeatedly challenged India's sovereignty over Arunachal or what was actually NEFA during the British period.

Interestingly enough, media persons in India never sought the Dalai Lama's opinion on the Indo-Tibet border question. Nor did they disturb the functionaries in the Tibetan government in exile, based in Shimla on this thorny issue. Then there is a large number of Tibetans living as refugees in different parts of India. It is not known how they appreciate India's efforts to define or redefine Tibet's boundary. Rahul Gandhi's veiled anti-China rhetoric is in reality aimed at playing with the gallery. □

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## COMMENT

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### What is Hate Speech?

SINCE 1947, VOTE BANK POLITICS has been integral to Indian elections as political parties use various strategies to appeal to particular groups. Inflammatory speeches are a common aspect of election rallies. But, if India is a democracy and the freedom of expression is a fundamental right, is there even space for a concept like hate speech to exist?

In a 2014 ruling, the Supreme Court of India provided the following definition of hate speech:

"Hate speech is an effort to marginalise individuals based on their membership in a group. Using expression that exposes the group to hatred, hate speech seeks to delegitimise group members in the eyes of the majority, reducing their social standing and acceptance within society."

The right to freedom of speech and expression is meant to safeguard democracy. Hate speech, on the other hand, erodes the democratic values of a nation by attempting to alienate

its minorities. It is more than spewing vitriol at a particular community. It is essentially challenging their right to a dignified existence.

Unfortunately, the Indian penal code does not provide a concrete provision for persecuting a case of hate speech. Section 153A penalises actions that disrupt harmony and promote enmity between different groups. Section 153B punishes words or actions that cause hatred towards a community or imply that they should be deprived of their rights as Indian citizens.

Law enforcement has to use a mix of these provisions and others to maintain social harmony. However, it is difficult to prosecute a crime which barely has a definition. What's more, persecution on the grounds mentioned above can be combated by evoking an individual's right to freedom of expression.

Hate speech is not a new phenomenon in India. In fact, India is a hotbed for hate speech. Hindustan Times even compiled a video with the top 4 "nasty remarks" made during the 2014 election season. Things have only gotten worse since 2014. A primary reason for this is the political polarisation strategy used

by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Under the BJP, Muslims have become the primary target of hate.

The rise of social media has increased the speed with which hate speech spreads. Platforms like Facebook, X [Twitter], and WhatsApp have made it possible for a speech made in Bihar to reach all the way to Karnataka in a few seconds. They have also made it possible for things which were not even said to make headlines in a matter of hours. Social media is a loosely regulated platform. Hate speech is a loosely monitored offence. When combined, the two make a stunning cocktail of unaccountability.

The twenty-first century opened with the "unity in diversity" ideal of India intact. Despite the excesses of the partition, the 1984 Sikh genocide, and the demolition of the Babri Masjid, politicians had stuck to the plurality narrative. Under the leadership of Narendra Modi, the Bharatiya Janata Party has demoted Muslims to second-class citizens.

Hate speech against Muslims has played a huge role in the shifting attitudes of the majority. India has one of the largest Muslim populations in the world. Muslims are also India's largest minority group. Hence, villainising a group as large as this is likely going to affect India's democratic nature. □□□ [Contributed by MC]

For **Frontier** Contact

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## NOTE

## 'At War' With NATO

*Jake Johnson writes:*

**B**RITISH PRIME MINISTER Keir Starmer and US President Joe Biden appear close to allowing Ukraine to use western-supplied long range missiles systems to target military sites deeper inside Russian territory, as long as those weapons are not US provided.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on September 12 that if the United States and the United Kingdom allow Ukraine to strike deep inside Russia with Western missiles, "it will mean nothing less than the direct involvement of NATO countries".

"This is not a question of allowing the Ukrainian regime to strike Russia with these weapons or not. It is a question of deciding whether or not NATO countries are directly involved in a military conflict", Putin told Russian state TV. "This will be their direct participation, and this, of course, will significantly change the very essence, the very nature of the conflict".

Perhaps this is a perilous new phase in a deadly war that has dragged on for two and a half years.

According to *The New York Times*, "President Biden appears on the verge of clearing the way for Ukraine to launch long-range Western weapons deep inside Russian territory, as long as it doesn't use arms provided by the United States".

"The issue, which has long been debated in the administration, came to a head on September 13 with the first official visit to the White House by Britain's new prime minister, Keir Starmer", "Britain has already signalled to the United States that it is eager to let Ukraine use its 'Storm Shadow' long-range missiles to strike

at Russian military targets far from the Ukrainian border. But it wants explicit permission from Mr Biden in order to demonstrate a coordinated strategy with the United States and France, which makes a similar missile."

Ahead of the decision, the Pentagon pointed to Iran's alleged transfer of ballistic missiles to Russia as further reason to bolster Ukraine's military capabilities. A spokesperson for Iran's foreign ministry said in response that "the publication of false and misleading reports about the transfer of Iranian weapons to some countries is simply ugly propaganda to conceal the large illegal arms support of the United States and some Western countries for the genocide in Gaza."

Ukraine, which has received roughly \$55.7 billion in military assistance from the US since February 2022, has already launched repeated drone attacks deep inside Russia, but Western permission for Kyiv to use long-range missiles could be a dire escalation.

As *Politico* noted, Moscow could retaliate against a long-range missile strike on Russia by hitting "a target inside NATO, such as the critical weapons supply hub in the Polish city of Rzeszów". Such an exchange could result in direct conflict between the nuclear-armed powers.

"Military experts argue any guidelines agreed for the British weapons at the two-hour summit in Washington could also then pave the way for the Ukrainians to fire US-supplied ATACMS—a tactical ballistic missile system—at airfields and army bases deep inside Russia", the outlet observed.

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This year our contributors include Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Sumanta Banerjee, Marcello Musto, Arup Baisya, Vinod Mubayi, Harsh Thakor, Olivia Banerjee, Pranjali Bandhu, Ranabir Samaddar, Himanshu Roy, Arup Kumar Sen, Atanu Chakravarty, Paranjay Guha Thakurta, Ritaiyoti Bandyopadhyay, Amit Bhattacharya, Asok Chattopadhyay, Abhijit Guha, T Vijayendra, Sujoy Prasad Bhattacharya, Farooque Chowdhury, Ranganayakamma, Nityananda Ghosh, Chaman Lal, I M Sharma, Jayanta Bhattacharya, Anup K Sinha, Sohini Sengupta, Manas Bakshi, Joydip Ghosal, Christopher Harding, Sunil Ray.....

The potential intensification and spread of the war comes as the prospect of a diplomatic resolution appears *nonexistent*, at least in the near term.

The war seems to be escalating further with devastating results for the people of Ukraine. Ukraine is not in a position to win the war, nor does it have a stronger bargaining position in talks than it did in late 2022 and yet they are trying to involve NATO countries, virtually endorsing Zelensky's strategy. If NATO involves at this stage the prospects of nuclear confrontation will be real. It won't remain in the nuclear bluff game. □□□

[Source: Common Dreams]

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 HUMRA QURAISHI'S COLUMN
 

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## These Fascist Times

*Humra Quraishi*

**A**RE WE LIVING IN A DEVELOPED scenario or is it turning all too barbaric?

It is definitely not a 'developed' scenario, when a full-fledged genocide is on in one country, when starvation deaths are taking place in several countries, when citizens are getting lynched, when women and children and teenagers are getting sold, when human bodies are getting bartered, when innocents are paraded as criminals, when homes of the poor and disadvantaged are bulldozed on a daily basis, when convicted criminals and rapists and murderers can go about on long or short breaks from the prison cells, when facts and accuracy are in danger of getting twisted by those in governance, when rulers cannot be trusted to take care of the hapless citizens, when poisonous communal propaganda gets unleashed about the 'other' to cause rifts and divides amongst the masses, when rapes take place even in work place and even along the roadside, when the so-called teachers unleash communal tactics on young children, when elections are fought not along the open transparent format but along dubious tactics, when candidates can be manipulated in the most dubious of ways, when there's no one out there to hear one's cries and shrieks, when even the dead aren't spared as graves and grave yards are on the land mafia's target list, when political mafia is unleashed all around to cause anarchy and loot and kill and hound!

Provocation for writing this is based on seeing and experiencing and sensing the traumatic happenings taking place. Communal poisoning reaching such obnoxious levels that just yesterday a news report caught attention—a medical doctor in Madhya Pradesh simply refused to take life-saving blood from a

Muslim for his Hindu patient!... In fact, what also caught attention is this video coming from Uttar Pradesh where a school head master/ teacher can be seen talking in that obnoxiously communal way in the context of his seven-year-old Muslim student... Every single day one hears and sees the blatantly obnoxious communal incidents and happenings. Alas, there's no stopping.

News reports coming from the Kashmir Valley seem disturbing as they reek of the Right -Wing tactics ... spreading out its agenda out there too. Not really surprising as this seems on in these recent years. I had detailed these build-ups in my book titled—'*Kashmir—The Unending Tragedy—Reports from the Front Lines*'. Published in 2019, it carries these details "...I'm reminded of the grave apprehensions that the Kashmiris been airing since news of the Sainik colonies being set up in the Valley first came up. They'd told me they considered the establishment's plan of setting up Sainik colonies a ploy to get Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) workers to reside in the Valley. 'in the coming years we Kashmiris will be pushed here and there and those RSS cadres will be given our prime areas. Look what a massive tragedy took place in Palestine... the Palestinians have been driven out of their homes and lands, and the Israelis have taken total control'. said one of the Kashmiri I had spoken to ..."

Today Palestine and the plight of its people is so very traumatic that those images moves one to tears ...severe level of sadness cum helplessness overtakes one. In fact, yesterday/ 10 September, as news reports carried details of 40 Palestinians killed within hours or minutes as Israeli bombardments continued on tents and camps housing Pales-

tinians, it not just shocked but shook one's soul!

In these fascist times it is not easy to take out marches or hold meets in solidarity with the Palestinians. Hundreds of our fellow citizens are grieved and very upset and pained by the ongoing genocide taking place in Palestine but have to keep their grief tight, within their hearts and hearth! Not sure about that space too, as bulldozers are the order of the day! Homes and human psyches can be bulldozed in no time, on any of the alibis!

Don't know how the so-called world leaders can witness the ongoing brutal killings of hundreds and thousands of innocent Palestinians.... men, women, children. Those Palestinians left alive are living in complete agony. There is not just lack of water and food but also affected is medical relief and aid and with that diseases and infections and viruses are peaking.

Would you by any remote chance call this scenario as the developed world or the so-called developed times we destined to live in! Sheer barbaric tactics unleashed on thousands of Palestinians who are either rather too often killed on the spot in the Israeli air strikes and bombardments or are dying a slow painful death, amidst lack of food and water and the basic essentials to survive.... Look at the irony of it all—a land full of olives and fruits has been taken away rather too forcefully and violently from its rightful citizens!

Perhaps, my sorrow and emotional pain and grief best relayed in this particular verse of *Sahir Ludhianvi*:

*"If there is a reason for my angry songs, it is this*

*That when I see the hungry farmers*

*The poor, the oppressed, the destitute, the helpless*

*My heart cannot participate in assemblies of pleasure*

*Even if I wish, I cannot write dreamy songs of love".*

□□□



## MAJORITARIANISM IN SOUTH ASIA

## Fascism in Slow Motion

*Mukul Kesavan*

**W**Henever mainstream politicians begin to mutter about infiltrators, fifth columnists and failed assimilation, that smell of sulphur is fascism in the air.

The problem with “fascism” as a description of any modern political tendency is that the term is a weapon of mass destruction that flattens the landscapes that it wants to describe. Fascism is so freighted with historically specific meaning that using it for other times and places can seem sloppy and excessive. And yet, juxtaposing the politics of contemporary south Asia with fascism, in its Nazi variant, serves a double purpose: it connects modern Indian majoritarianism with one of its ideological ancestors and it helps people name and identify the ideological kernel of fascism that survived to fight another day.

India’s ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata party (BJP) is the political arm of a Hindu militia, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), founded in 1925, around the time Adolf Hitler began to find his political bearings in a routed, angry Germany. The RSS is a nationalist militia that defines India as a Hindu nation; only Hindus can be members. While there are many similarities between the RSS and the fascist paramilitary organisations of the pre-war decades, from uniformed drills and distinctive salutes to a persistent anxiety about masculinity, at the core of both is a feral ethnic nationalism that aims to mobilise a racial or religious majority against an allegedly encroaching minority.

People have become familiar with violence and discrimination directed

at minority religious groups in India, particularly Muslims, through this last decade of majoritarian rule. Lynching connected to the cattle trade, riots, the bulldozing of Muslim homes, the criminalisation of love between Hindu women and Muslim men via the bogey of “love jihad”, has been a specific feature of Narendra Modi’s tenure as prime minister. But the German inspiration for the BJP’s short way with minorities goes back to the 1930s.

In March 1939, the RSS’s principal ideologue, MS Golwalkar published “We, Or Our Nationhood Defined”, laying out his organisation’s blueprint for a Hindu nation. This is the relevant passage: “German national pride has now become the topic of the day. To keep up the purity of the nation and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic races—the Jews. National pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindusthan to learn and profit by.”

The BJP has taken this lesson to heart. Its local leaders and cadres refer to Muslims obliquely and directly as termites, the status of medieval mosques is called into question, and the BJP has made a concerted attempt to marginalise Muslims and make them politically irrelevant: among the hundreds of elected BJP legislators in state assemblies and parliament, there are no Muslims.

The assault on Muslim livelihood through restrictions on the cattle

trade, the official stigmatisation of the hijab in public institutions, and the attempt to smuggle in a religious test for citizenship through the back door of the Citizenship Amendment Act, represent a systematic attempt to unsettle Muslims and destabilise their status as equal citizens.

Nazism is majoritarianism speeded up. Alternately, contemporary majoritarianism in south Asia, is fascism in slow motion

The lesson that modern majoritarians learned from Nazism was that the concerted demonisation of a minority was the quickest way of turning a nominal majority into a politically aggrieved behemoth. The success of Hitler in turning the most assimilated minority in Europe into an expendable underclass in less than 20 years is the ultimate majoritarian precedent. As Golwalkar wrote just before the second world war, “non-Hindu” people could either totally assimilate themselves into Hindu culture or “...stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment—not even citizen’s rights”.

Nazism seems *sui generis* for two reasons. One, the speed of Germany’s transformation from vanquished nation to genocidal Reich and two, the industrial processes that powered the Holocaust. But if one focuses, not on the breakneck speed of this political project, but its consistent goal—majoritarian supremacy through the subordination of dehumanised minorities—naming its lineal descendants becomes easier. Nazism, in this view, is majoritarianism speeded up. Alternately, contemporary majoritarianism in south Asia is fascism in slow motion.

To look for a Weimar-like collapse in modern India is silly; India is a sub-continental republic with a

flawed but embedded democratic system; reconstituting it into a supremacist Hindu nation will be a drawn-out affair. The last general election is a sign that it might never come to pass. This is not to say that contemporary majoritarianism is a necessarily gradual business. Buddhist majoritarianism in Myanmar

climaxed in the genocidal ethnic cleansing of the Muslim Rohingya in Rakhine province. The Sri Lankan state decimated its Tamil minority in a savage war to consolidate Sinhala Buddhist supremacy.

Whether it's slow or quick, the AfD or the BJP, majoritarian parties share with Nazism a steadfast, sinis-

ter, obsession with minorities. Whenever mainstream politicians begin to mutter about infiltrators, fifth columnists and failed assimilation, that smell of sulphur is fascism in the air.

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[Source: The Guardian. Mukul Kesavan is a novelist, historian and political and social essayist]

## IDEOLOGICAL SHIFT?

# 'Jamaat' Returns to Electoral Politics

*Jehangir Ali*

**J**AMAAT-E-ISLAMI'S (JEI) decision to contest the upcoming assembly election in Jammu and Kashmir marks a significant milestone in the ideological trajectory of the socio-political-religious outfit which has played an important role in shaping the erstwhile state's troubled history.

A statement purportedly issued by a Srinagar-based spokesperson distanced the outfit from the individual decisions of its serving and former members, who will slug it out in the electoral arena in coming weeks as J&K goes to polls in its first assembly election in a decade.

However, political analysts believe that the expression of electoral ambitions mirrors the crisis that the outfit has been facing since 2019, when the Union government tightened the strings on separatist groups and their sympathisers, including Jamaat, ahead of J&K's demotion into two Union territories.

Some in Kashmir also believe that after remaining in political wilderness for more than three decades, Jamaat's decision could change the contours of the conflict in J&K.

JeI, which started out as a puritan and reformist movement for social and religious causes, is widely seen as the ideological fountainhead of the Hizbul Mujahideen, the largest

among more than two dozen militant outfits that have been waging an armed struggle in Kashmir against New Delhi since the early 1990s.

With a three-tier organisational structure, JeI has around 3,500-4,000 basic members (Rukun) in J&K who preside over associate members (Umeedwar-e-Rukun). Only basic members are eligible for voting in the organisational elections to elect Ameer-e-Jamaat (head) and Majlis-i-Shora, the top decision making advisory council.

However, those affiliated with Jamaat or Jamaat aspirants, though part of the three-tier structure, can't vote. Then, there are Jamaat sympathisers who take the cadre strength to an estimated 20,000. Many of them used to participate in Jamaat congregations and also vote.

The JeI is rooted in Maulana Maududi's radical political and Islamist thought. The outfit has also called for the resolution of the Kashmir dispute in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations which has put it under the spotlight of the government agencies.

However, the outfit has historically been flexible to the idea of elections in J&K which were held under the auspices of the Indian Constitution. Though the banned outfit never ran any poll boycott campaign, it unofficially discouraged

Jamaat members and their families from voting and also endorsed the boycott calls of separatist groups following the eruption of armed insurgency.

Speculations about the fledgling political trajectory of the outfit started doing rounds during the recent parliamentary elections when some Jamaatis, who are part of the three-tier structure, voted at few places in Kashmir.

Then, a five-member panel, headed by Jamaat member Ghulam Qadir Lone, was formed to hold parleys with the Union government, with J&K Apni Party chief Altaf Bukhari mediating the effort.

Amid rumours that the government was planning to end the ban on Jamaat, the outfit's prospects of participating in the upcoming elections gained momentum.

However, the ban is unlikely to be lifted soon. Sources said that the Union government was holding its horses in case JeI's proxy candidates in the upcoming election don't perform well. If they manage to pull off some upsets, it will hand the kind of ammunition the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) requires to silence its political detractors, especially in Kashmir.

A political analyst based in south Kashmir, which has been a bastion of Jamaat, said he didn't add much significance to the "fluid" decision of the Jamaat members and its affiliates to contest the election which, he claimed, "lacked official sanction".

“Most members of the Jamaat’s advisory council are in jail. Ideally, this decision [to contest elections] should have come from them. Those in the panel who are talking with the government are not part of the advisory council,” he said.

However, there are others who argue that since JeI is a banned outfit, it can’t contest the election directly and was hence fielding its proxy candidates. This argument has prompted speculations that there could be some understanding between the Jamaat and the BJP, which has failed to make any significant electoral impact in Kashmir even after being in power at the centre for more than 10 years.

It is being speculated that the saffron party was now relying on the Jamaat and other players, such as Awami Ittehad Party led by Engineer Rashid and Bukhari, to cut regional parties to size by getting ‘sentimental’ voters to cast their ballot and disturbing the traditional voting patterns.

Sayar Reshi, the deputy director of Jamaat-run Falah-e-Aam Trust, which is involved in charity and educational work, claimed that the outfit had unanimously decided to join electoral politics and work for the welfare of the people of J&K.

“If a leaf gets detached from the tree, it wilts and dies,” Reshi, who is contesting the election from Kulgam assembly constituency, said, quoting a verse of Pakistani philosopher and poet Sir Mohammad Iqbal.

He added, “We have to be a part of the system and work for the welfare of our people”.

The JeI was a part of the system in 1969 when it fought the Panchayat elections. Its romance with Indian democracy lasted till the assembly election of 1987, whose rigging is widely believed to have sparked armed insurgency in Kashmir.

Some of Jamaat’s former members include the Hurriyat hawks Syed Ali Geelani and Ghulam Nabi Sehrai.

The outfit was banned from 1990-1996, when it espoused Hizbul as its armed outfit following which the party held internal elections and elected Ghulam Mohammad Bhat as its chief.

In 1998, Bhat distanced the outfit from the ongoing guerrilla warfare in Kashmir. From 1995- 2002, Jamaat was hounded by state-backed militia Ikhwan during which thousands of Jamaat members were killed.

Two sons of former Jamaat amir Sheikh Ghulam Hassan were killed. Another top Jamaat leader from Shopian, late Hakeem Ghulam Nabi, also lost his son in an encounter. It is a saga of personal tragedies that remains unresolved for many Jamaat members.

Jamaat got some political space when People’s Democratic Party (PDP) founder Mufti Mohammad Sayeed formed a coalition government with the Congress in 2002. Under Mufti’s rule, the outfit reopened its offices, schools, libraries and charity organisations which continued till February 2019 when it was banned again.

The outfit, however, remained affiliated with the Hurriyat till 2004 when the separatist conglomerate split into Geelani faction and the moderate faction led by Mirwaiz Umar Farooq. The Jamaat stayed out of both.

A Jamaat insider told *The Wire* that some young activists and members seem to be moving away from the radical Mawdudi school of Islamic thought to the reformative and liberal Ghamidi school, propounded by Mawdudi’s pupil and Pakistani scholar Javed Ahmad Ghamidi.

However, the political analyst quoted above said that the division

in the ranks of the Jamaat was unlikely to alter the electoral landscape in Kashmir.

Apart from the three Jamaat candidates from Devsar, Pulwama and Kulgam, going to polls in the first phase of assembly election scheduled on September 18, there are speculations that the outfit might support the candidate from Zainapora in South Kashmir and contest the Langate constituency in North Kashmir.

Former Jamaat member Dr Talat Majid, who briefly joined the mainstream, is contesting election from Pulwama assembly constituency as an independent candidate backed by the Jamaat. Asked whether the Jamaat was going through an ideological shift, he told *The Wire* that the outfit was going “more through a political shift”.

“Ideologies work in time and space. We have to be accommodative and flexible. Separatism worked in Kashmir but what were the reasons? The rigging of 1987 assembly elections created a situation for separatism to thrive which prompted a mainstream leader like Abdul Gani Lone to become a separatist. Today, the geopolitical scenario has changed. The sooner we realise it, the better.” he said. □□□

[Courtesy: *The Wire*]

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**“ADJUSTMENTS AND COMPROMISES”**


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## How Women Actors in Bengali Film Industry Are ‘Silenced’

**Varsha Sriram  
Madhusree Goswami**

*[The Hema report came at a time when safer workplaces for women were under the spotlight over the RG Kar rape case.]*

**W**HEN BENGALI ACTOR Tanika Basu read parts of the Justice K Hema Committee report, which detailed how women working in Malayalam film industry were asked to make ‘adjustments’ and ‘compromises’—euphemisms for sexual favours—it felt all too familiar.

“This is what most of us women artists go through on a daily basis... There is an understated expectation for ‘compromise’ or ‘sex on demand’ within the Bengali film industry, too. This systemic patriarchy, which has been normalised, is extremely problematic.”

The Hema Committee report comes at a time when the debate for safer workplaces is under the spotlight over the rape and murder of the postgraduate trainee doctor in Kolkata’s RG Kar Medical College and Hospital.

As the protests in the West Bengal capital continue to rage, at least five films, including Parambrata Chattopadhyay’s *Ei Raat Tomar Amar*, Ron Raj’s *Porichoy Gupta*, Saurav Palodhi’s *Onko Ki Kothin*, and Krishnendu Chatterjee’s *Jomaloye Jibonto Bhanu*, have either been rescheduled or indefinitely postponed.

On 27 August, nearly 50 women artists from the Women’s Forum for Screen Workers also released a charter of demands advocating for safer working conditions in the industry.

“Sexual abuse and misogyny have been normalised in the Bengali film industry for years. I have been

at the receiving end of such behaviour for years now. It is an open secret,” said Sreelekha Mitra, who is best known for her role in *Once Upon a Time in Calcutta*.

Mitra was among the first few to speak out and file a police complaint against Malayalam movie director Ranjith alleging misbehaviour, which forced him to resign as chairman of the Kerala Film Academy. Ranjith has denied the allegations.

Elaborating on the ‘understated expectation for sex on demand’, Basu, who has been in the industry for 10 years, said,

“In 2023, I was taken aback when a casting director sent me a form to fill up, below which there was a clause asking, ‘If I was comfortable in compromise’. When I asked him what it means, he said that he was surprised that despite working for years in the industry, ‘I did not know what that means’. He said that I needn’t sign it if I didn’t want to, but I was still shocked that this happened...”

Ananya Sen, who acted in *A Suitable Boy* directed by Mira Nair, admitted that as a male-dominated industry, patriarchy and misogyny are both ‘instilled’.

“A very senior actor in the industry would joke about how he used to shoot intimate scenes multiple times to touch a woman’s breasts. He has done that with me too. The irony is that after being felt up, I did not realise. I never spoke up, but maybe I should have. I understand that it is

wrong...” Sen said.

When asked how ‘compromises’ would be asked for, “*Samajdaro ke liye ishare kaafi hote hai* (a hint is enough for the wise)” is how Basu described it.

“People won’t use the word ‘compromise’ but will make it somewhat clear that you have to meet them and be available whenever they call you for a meeting late in the night. If you say no, you will be sidelined. You probably won’t get more work from that production house for the next couple of years,” said Tanika Basu.

The Hema Committee report, too, highlighted how women in the Malayalam film industry were scared to speak out over the “fear of being sidelined.”

“In most cases, when this (sexual misconduct) happens, women end up keeping quiet because of the fear... Going to the police is not the solution because most of the time, we are told that since we belong to the industry, this is bound to happen... ‘Then don’t do films’ is the response,” Sen said.

On 8 September, the Directors’ Association of Eastern India suspended a Bengali filmmaker after an actress approached the West Bengal Commission for Women, accusing him of harassment and indecent behaviour.

The filmmaker denied allegations, saying what was being construed as misbehaviour was “unintentional,” according to reports.

Women actors also highlighted how sexist jokes and body shaming were commonplace. Male actors and technicians feel “entitled to make lewd comments as jokes”. Tanika Basu recounted how she was denied movie roles because she was told that she was “not sexy or hot enough...” and that she would ‘not sell’.



“If you speak back to them, they call you ‘a feminist’ and brush it off as a joke. But why would you joke about it? Who is giving you this entitlement to body shame us? When they call us feminists, it is as if they are abusing us.”

Sen recounted how senior male actors, directors, and technicians talk about women and their body parts to their faces. “When you speak up, you are asked to take it as a joke and be alright with it...” she added.

Sen, who earlier worked as an assistant director, also highlighted the lack of basic facilities for women technicians in the film industry. “I remember when I was an assistant director, there would be no toilet. We won’t be able to use the bathroom for hours. We weren’t allowed to go and use the one which was in the actor’s vanity van,” she said.

Actor-director Parambrata Chattopadhyay, who’s known for films like *Kahaani* and *Abhijaan*, said, “Sexual harassment, unfortunately, has been normalised for decades in every single film industry.”

“Yes, there is misogyny, patriarchy and exploitation,” he conceded.

“As male members of this fraternity, we have certain responsibilities... I (an actor) cannot suddenly pass a comment to a woman (about her). The normalisation of these things leads to other incidents like a male co-actor knocking on a female co-actor’s door in the wee hours of the night (as was reported in the Malayalam film industry in the Hema Committee report).”

The women actors further highlighted the huge pay parity between male and female actors within the Bengali film industry.

“We as female actors want for our work to be consumed, not for us to be consumed,” added Basu.

Meanwhile, Rupanjana Mitra, a Bengali film and television actress, lamented that the conversation al-

ways ends at “we need better safeguards for women” but then “the cycle of abuse repeats”.

However, Sreelekha Mitra said that the discussion was taking place now since the spotlight is on violence against women.

Over the last few weeks, several actors, producers, directors, camerapersons, and technicians have joined the protests in Kolkata in large numbers.

On 3 September, the Mamata Banerjee-led government passed the Aparajita Woman and Child (West Bengal Criminal Laws and Amendment) Bill 2024, introducing death penalty for the convicted perpetrator in instances when the assault kills or leaves the victim in a vegetative state.

Meanwhile, the Women’s Forum for Screen Workers on 27 August wrote to four bodies, including Federation of Cine Technicians and Workers of Eastern India (FCTWEI), West Bengal Motion Pictures Artist Forum, Eastern India Motion Picture Association, Tele Academy, and the West Bengal government asking for better working conditions for women.

Basu, Sen, and actor Churni Ganguly (who recently portrayed the role of Alia Bhatt’s mother in *Rocky Aur Rani ki Prem Kahani*) said, ‘the Hema Committee report had pushed women actors to come out and speak about the abuse they face’.

The FCTWEI, on 30 August, launched the Suraksha Bandhu Committee to address and resolve complaints of sexual misconduct on film sets.

The association emphasised on the industry’s zero-tolerance stance on the mistreatment of women and assured that any complaints received would be treated with utmost confidentiality, and the identity of the complainants would be protected.

The Women’s Forum for Screen Workers recommended multiple sug-

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gestions to improve the working conditions of women in Bengali cinema, some of which include:

- The need for an ‘intimacy coordinator’ or ‘intimacy director’ in film sets;
- A 24x7 helpline for survivors of sexual harassment as an effective tool of ‘whistleblowing’;
- Adoption of the widest possible definition of ‘workplace’ and ‘worker’ as laid out in the POSH

Act, 2013;

- Addressing gender-based violence in the workplace through the use of international regulations like the ILO Convention No. 190 [C190] which recognises the right to a world of work free from violence and harassment;
- Regular awareness initiatives on the workers’ rights and procedures to seek justice when that right is denied without fear or

favour;

Ananya Sen said, “she is looking forward to the creation of a body like the Women’s Cinema Collective (WCC) in Kerala”.

Ganguly pointed out that it is the collective responsibility of everyone on set to ensure “that a safe working environment is provided to women actors, technicians, and artistes”. □□□

[Courtesy: The Quint]

## POST-BOX KASHMIR

### Lives in Letters

Joydip Ghosal

**P**OST-BOX KASHMIR, TWO Lives in Letters by Divya Arya (Publisher Duckbill) is a unique book which provides the readers a commentary on the political history of Kashmir. Are Kashmiris really invisible to the rest of the country? Why do womenfolk in Kashmir do stone pelting? Try to imagine a situation where you remain confined within four walls with no social media or internet. And most important—“Do only Muslims live in Kashmir?” According to Reya Merhotra this book acts as introductory handbook to others who are outside Kashmir. It unveils the two faces of the country which live in parallel realities.

The participants of the letters were young. Their minds were less rigid and they were more forgiving.

It was a part of BBC project when two teenagers shared their lives from Srinagar to Delhi and back. Divya Arya asked them to be pen pals. She placed their conversation against the backdrop of violent past and turbulent present realities. This book picks up the cudgel of attempting to portray the life in Kashmir from the perspectives of young teenagers of Kashmiri origins.

On the other hand it broadens the vision of those who live outside the

militarised zone. They are given a context of understanding the nuanced socio-cultural history of Kashmir.

Divya Arya is an award-winning journalist. She currently works with BBC. She explores social justice and human rights issues through a gender lens. She has presented the global news programme OS on BBC World Service Radio. She is also associated with a chat show *worklifeindia*. She was also a recipient of Knight-Wallace Fellow.

Divya Arya stressed that to capture the impact of geopolitics, people needed to step away from that. People have to cover the whole span from the action on the street to the serenity of home.

In 1990 a long-festered armed struggle gained mass approval. Armed forces were deployed in the valley. Rise of various militant groups also complicated the matter. Armed forces were provided special immunity to tackle the crisis. It led to wide-spread human rights violation. The 1990s also witnessed minority Kashmiri Hindus being attacked by hardliners. Tens of thousands have been assassinated since then. On the other hand protest for self-rule regularly rocked the city.

The new generation had no

memory of turbulent 1990s. Like the two writers of the letters, Duaa in Srinagar was born in 2002 and Saumya was born in Delhi in 2001. But Divya Arya pointed out that it was uneasy calm.

Tufail Ahmed Mattoo was killed by a tear gas shell fired by security in Srinagar. Angry young protestors confronted the security forces. More than hundred youths died in the violent clashes. In 2009 the allegation of rape and murder again rocked the valley.

According to the author Kashmir’s challenges come from within. Anger and discontent against the establishment manifested in the form of stone-pelting.

Divya Arya stressed that we needed to listen to the conversation of the new generation. “Who were they talking to? Who were they talking about?... How much did a young girl growing up in the country’s capital Delhi know about the life of a girl in one of the most militarised zone in the world?” Did adults influence their knowledge? Was it swayed by the knowledge they lived in, offline or online?

The author rightly pointed out that there could be no definitive answer. Instead one should try to get to the bare bones peeling off the layers. These letters were part of a project of BBC between those in Kashmir with those outside it. But there are certain tricky aspects asso-

ciated with it. The author cited the example of Zaira Wasim who is the famous actress of Bollywood film *Dangal*, released in January 2016. In January 2017 she returned to her home town Srinagar and got photographed with the then Chief Minister Mehbooba Moofiti resulting in storm on social media. Did she espouse the government? Zaira Wasim issued an open letter of apology on Instagram. She later deleted it. This incident is an indicator of the fact the even teenager had to tread the

fine line cautiously. So before initiating the project this thing had to be taken into consideration.

Besides these letters the author attempted to present a backdrop, especially the simmering tension after the announcement of CAA. This book is interspersed with the nuggets of contemporary history and events. For instance the author gave the example of Kanhaiya Kumar's Azadi speech. Popular dub-step artist Dub Sharma remixed the speech with Punjabi folk tune. In an interview

with BBC he told that the word Azadi was freedom of expression for him. Puspavathy Poypadathu used this slogan also in a creative way. But in Kashmir the word assumed a different hue. The author discussed different aspects associated with it.

These letters turned into a handbook of information for those who want to delve deeper into the nuanced history of Kashmir. The author does a commendable job by weaving present-day facts with history.

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## UNENDING NIGHTMARE

# Violence Resurges in Manipur

S B

**E**THNIC TENSIONS HAVE turned Manipur into an open war Zone. Struggling to contain the unrest the authorities have re-imposed a curfew and internet blackout. The Manipur Police said there had been a significant escalation in the 16-month old conflict, accusing militants of using drones and long-range rockets against civilians and security forces. More than 200 people have been reported killed and at least 60,000 displaced in 16 months.

The violent clashes in Manipur began in May 2023, following a court order instructing the Manipur government to consider extending special economic benefits and quotas in government jobs and education enjoyed by Kukis to the majority of Meiteis

Following the recent violent incident, Imphal West District Magistrate Th. Kirankumar issued an order imposing restrictions from 7 pm of September 1 "until further notice" under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita.

In a statement, the state government said it learnt about the attack on unarmed villagers, perpetrated reportedly by Kuki militants using

"drones, bombs and many sophisticated weapons", as per a report by *The Hindu*.

Manipur witnessed arson and bloody clashes between the two warring communities—the tribal Kuki-Zos and non-tribal Meiteis—last year in May.

Following the end of colonial rule, the erstwhile princely state of Manipur merged with the Union of India in October 1949. It was made a Union Territory in 1956, and a full-fledged state in 1972.

The state of Manipur comprises three ethnic groups—the Meiteis, Nagas, and Kukis. The Meiteis constitute the majority, inhabiting mainly the Imphal valley and surrounding areas; the Scheduled Tribes, Nagas and Kukis, live in the hilly regions.

The Nagas and Kukis have had bitter relations marked by violence since the early to mid-1990s. Despite efforts to maintain peace, tensions were never really resolved between the two communities.

The Naga-Kuki clash of 1992 displaced about 114,300 people and burned around 600 villages, marking the first major prolonged ethnic conflict in the region.

The Meitei-Pangal conflict in 1993 resulted in about 100 casualties and many internal displacements, followed by the Kuki-Paite clash of 1997, which displaced about 22,000 people.

Gradually, mistrust percolated into the four communities—Kukis, Nagas, Zo and Meiteis. The non-Meiteis have been cautious of the Meitei's dominant role in Manipur's political landscape.

In the past, hill communities like the Nagas have fled the Imphal Valley in significant numbers to escape the violence that erupts between tribals and non-tribals.

In June 2001, the Government of India and the NSCN-IM signed the Bangkok Agreement that extended the three-year ceasefire including in the Naga-inhabited areas of Manipur; the agreement was not accepted by the Meiteis, and violent clashes killed 13 people in one day. Similarly, the Kukis' demand for a Kukiland-Zale'n-gam also caused apprehensions to the Meiteis.

Earlier on May 3, 2023, violence was witnessed during a 'Tribal Solidarity March' called by the All Tribal Students' Union of Manipur (ATSUM) to oppose the demand.

The violence escalated from burning the Anglo-Kuki War Memorial to destroying homes and killings, displacing about 5,000 people within 48 hours.

Social media disinformation and misinformation fuelled further violence, including rapes. Additionally, the looting of about 3,000 arms and ammunition from police stations and state armories exacerbated the conflict.

Inspector General of Police IK Muivah had said around 175 people were killed across the state, and 5,000 cases of arson including the torching of more than 4,700 houses were reported. Moreover, 386 religious structures (254 churches, mostly belonging to the Kukis, and 132 temples) were vandalised.

The Central government imposed curfews, shut down the internet, and dispatched security forces. It also set up relief camps and established a peace committee for Manipur, chaired by the state governor, but the initiative was hampered by disagreements about its composition.

Manipur shares a nearly 400-km border with Myanmar and the coup there in 2021 pushed thousands of refugees into the state. Around 5,000 immigrants, including women and children, fled from conflict-hit Myanmar.

Kukis share ethnic lineage with Myanmar's Chin tribe and Meiteis feared they would be outnumbered by the arrival of the refugees.

The tribal communities of Manipur have believed that the potential granting of ST status to Meiteis as a threat to their rights, territories and lands.

As per a report by *The Times of*

*India*, the Meitei community has harboured long-standing sentiment that the tribal population of Manipur enjoys exclusive rights over their ancestral lands and traditional customs, as enshrined in Article 371 of the Constitution.

Demographically, the Meiteis constitute more than 50% of the state's total population and fall either under the unreserved or Other Backward Class (OBC) category; the Kukis and the Nagas (who are Christians) are STs. The Meiteis inhabit only 10% of the total land cover of Manipur, whereas the Nagas and the Kukis (together constituting around 40% of the population) live in the remaining 90% of the land.

The Meiteis are not legally permitted to buy land in and around the Kuki- and Naga-inhabited areas.

Meiteis have been demanding the ST status under the banner the Scheduled Tribe Demand Committee of Manipur (STDCM) since 2012. But it gained momentum only in 2017, with the community increasingly becoming vocal and active in their pursuit of recognition.

According to a report by the Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) in May, 67,000 displacements took place in Manipur after the violence. "Protests turned violent in Churachandpur district on May 3, and the violence spread to other districts, including Imphal East, Imphal West, Bishnupur, Tengnupal, and Kangpokipi, triggering around 67,000 dis-

placements," the report said.

More than three-quarters of the movements took place within Manipur, but almost a fifth were to the neighbouring state of Mizoram and smaller numbers to Nagaland and Assam.

The tourism industry in the state has also suffered, with patients from Myanmar stopping medical visits. Retail inflation at 9.7% in September 2023 has led to economic insecurity, and unprovoked attacks on farmers and road blockages have caused food security concerns, according to a report by *The Diplomat*.

The conflict has also affected mental health, with rising post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) cases since the violence began. Insurgent groups are gaining popularity as protectors, with dormant groups reactivating and many returning from their bases in unstable Myanmar.

Despite the Lok Sabha elections in 2024, Manipur witnessed a lack of enthusiasm among voters. The violence overshadowed the polls, affecting individuals and civil society groups.

Meanwhile, Kukis are demanding union territory status of the hilly region, where they live because of permanent animosity between the two communities. Surprisingly, despite unending violence and blood-letting Prime Minister Narendra Modi never visited Manipur that is literally burning. Nor did he make any statement on Manipur in Parliament. □□

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## NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE

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### Internal Labour Migration

**Chetan Choithani**  
**Arslan Wali Khan**

**T**HE CURRENT STAGE OF country's demographic transition has created a youth bulge which provides the country a

'demographic window of opportunity' to accelerate economic growth. But widespread joblessness amongst youth has also raised apprehensions

about losing this opportunity and transforming the youth population into an obligation which will have far-reaching social consequences.

India's demography lies at the heart of a trend of a growing North-South divide. A significant proportion of India's population resides in a few economically backward states in the country's north, while the



income and employment opportunities have come to be concentrated in the demographically advanced southern states. Recent patterns of work migration show that young workers from the employment-scarce north are moving to the economically dynamic south for work. But these dynamics have also prompted resurgent regionalism in the political rhetoric. Southern states have increasingly questioned the current demographic basis to determine political representation and the sharing of the country's tax resources that they say currently favours the north, despite their own greater contributions to the country's finances and superior track record of governance. These regional tensions have begun to be manifested in a resentment against inter-state migration in some southern states.

India has now overtaken China to become the most populous country in the world. India's current population of 1.45 billion exceeds China's 1.42 billion, and the projections show India's continued demographic dominance in the foreseeable future (UN-DESA 2024). This change in the demographic ranking has led to the revival of alarmist views that posit high population growth as resulting in a grim future for India. Poor and marginalised communities, particularly those belonging to country's religious minorities, are the target of these ill-informed views.

A significant proportion of India's population resides in a few economically backward states in the country's North, while the income and employment opportunities have come to be concentrated in the demographically advanced Southern states.

The evidence, on the contrary, show that India has completed its fertility transition and achieved the replacement level fertility of 2 children per couple. Moreover, India

has experienced *one of the fastest fertility declines* in the world, and birth rates have been converging across socio-economic groups with *most women desiring less than two children*. But there is a significant net addition to the country's population because of the population momentum stemming from its young age-structure. The current trajectory of replacement-level fertility means that India's population is growing but at a slower pace.

The present demographic regime of falling fertility (and reduced mortality) also offers India a demographic dividend. Currently, half of India's population is aged 25-64 years, and this figure increases to nearly 70% when one considers the population in the age group of 15-64 years. This demographic advantage will prevail over the next few decades with the share of those in the ages of 25-64 years reaching over 900 million around 2050.

There is some evidence that the demographic dividend has contributed to India's economic growth, and the future of country's economy is also predicated on availability of a large pool of workers. However, significant concerns remain on whether the country will be able to tap this opportunity fully due to past policy neglect of human development.

A defining feature of India's demography is the wide regional heterogeneity. Although different states vary in terms of population size, age structure, fertility rates and mortality regimes, a distinct broad regional pattern of demographic behaviour is the North-South divide. This divide has increasingly defined country's politics in recent years.

Southern Indian states that include Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana led the country's demographic transition to reach a low-mortality-low-fertility regime, while northern states have

fallen behind. Data provided by the National Commission on Population (2020) show that in Rajasthan 44 newborns die before reaching their first birthday, compared with 10 children in Kerala. Similarly, while fertility has fallen below replacement level in all the southern states, with Kerala achieving replacement fertility way back in 1988, the four large northern states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh are yet to reach the two-children-per-couple birth rates.

It is important to note that birth rates in these large northern states have seen significant reductions in recent years with the overall trend pointing to fertility convergence across states. In fact, the recent National Family Health Survey (2019-21) shows that Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan have achieved replacement fertility (IIPS and ICF 2022). At the same time, the effect of high population growth in the past means that these four large northern states account for nearly 40% of India's population, almost twice the share of the five southern states.

This North-South demographic divide will deepen further in the future. The north will continue to add significant numbers to India's population while the south's share will decline. For example, between 2011 and 2036, Kerala's population will increase from 33 million to 37 million, whereas Bihar will add nearly 45 million people during the same period—an addition higher than the total population of Kerala (National Commission on Population 2020).

Population growth in the north also accompanies ageing in the south. In 2011, the median age in Bihar was 19.9 years whereas this was 29.9 years in Tamil Nadu, a gap of 10 years that will increase to 12.4 years by 2036. Similarly, in 2036 nearly 23% of Kerala's population will be aged 60 years and

older where the corresponding share for Bihar will be 11%.

Early public investment in human development, particularly education, fuelled the demographic transition in the south. In particular, female education played a crucial role in fertility decline in the south. This favourable social policy environment that prompted the early onset of demographic transition in the south also produced development dividends for the region.

Better governance and the availability of an educated workforce meant that when India opened its economy in the early 1990s, private investment favoured the southern states (along with some other regions in the country's west with long entrepreneurial history, such as Gujarat and Maharashtra) via-a-vis its northern counterparts. To cite just one statistic, in 2011-12 the fresh Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Karnataka amounted to \$1.53 billion which was nearly 2.5 times than the total FDI investment of \$619 million received by the four large northern states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh combined.

The widening North-South demographic and economic split also underpins recent shifts in work migration which is now moving southward. In broad terms, post-Independence India has seen two major work migration streams involving low-skilled workers who constitute a large majority of migrants: rural-rural migration in the 1970s and 1980s following the Green Revolution, and rural-urban migration beginning in the 1990s since the advent of economic reforms.

For **Frontier Contact**

**DHYANBINDU**

COLLEGE SQUARE

Of course, rural-urban migration was also not insignificant prior to the 1990s. In fact, large-scale migration from rural areas fuelled the growth of India's large metropolitan centres of Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and Chennai. Similarly, rural-rural migration for farm work in the Green Revolution belt states of Punjab and Haryana still continues. But the growing stress on farm-dependent livelihoods and an urban-centric economic growth trajectory post-1990s means cities now attract an increasing number of migrants in India.

Most labour migration involves movement by low-/semi-skilled workers for informal jobs. This migration is predominantly circular and largely involves men.

Official statistics on migration severely underestimate work mobility. The Census 2011 enumerated 45 million economic migrants, and the numbers from the more recent Periodic Labour Force Survey 2020-21 showed that of the estimated 317 million migrants in India, only 34 million (11%) moved for work-related reasons (Census of India 2011 by National Statistical Office 2022). Alternative estimates suggest that there are over 100 million labour migrants in India comprising nearly 20% of the country's workforce.

Most labour migration involves movement by low-semi-skilled workers for informal jobs. This migration is predominantly circular and largely involves men. But agrarian decline means that migration is becoming 'permanent circular', in that male migrants now spend a large part of year away from origin villages for non-farm work. This contrast with earlier patterns of seasonal migration that occurred in agriculturally lean periods.

The underdeveloped states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh in country's north along

with backward eastern states of Odisha and West Bengal are the key outmigration hotspots. Some of these states, such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, have a long history of high labour migration and continue to be leading migrant-sending regions. Work destinations vary widely and depend on networks, work availability and wages. India's mega cities of Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai remain popular age-old work destinations for low-skilled rural migrants from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. And there are other established migration corridors such as *Odisha's Ganjam district that sends a million migrants to Surat* in Gujarat for work in diamond industry and textile power looms.

The growing North-South migration stems from spatial disparities. But migration also provides a means to address these inequalities.

Migrants can help fill the labour vacuum [in the South] created by the greying of the local population and help the region to maintain its economic edge.

There is a recognition of the importance of migration in some quarters. To welcome outside migrants, Kerala, for example, has introduced various benefits for low-skilled inter-state migrants, such as health insurance, allowance for children's education, and shared housing. Kerala has benefitted enormously from remittances from the Gulf countries but there also seems to be a realisation amongst political and policy circles that its migrant workers also enriched the Middle East. Kerala's policy initiatives for low-skilled migrant communities appear to also encourage more permanent, family-based migration, driven in many ways by poor communities' desire to take advantage of free and superior public education for their children. The success of the *Roshni* scheme that bridges language barriers

ers to encourage greater school enrolment among migrant children is a good illustration. Migrant children have counterbalanced Kerala's dwindling school-age population and rejuvenated Kerala's schools, and they provide potential human resource for the state's future economic development.

While concentration of economic

opportunities in the South is leading to migration moving southward, the concerns around replacement migration are unfounded. A bulk of labour mobility is circular and not permanent. If anything, the southern states need to encourage replacement migration to offset population decline. Given the demographic and development differences between the north

and the south, migration provides an important means to reap the demographic dividend as well as achieve regionally balanced development. □□

*[Chetan Choithani is an assistant professor at the School of Social Sciences, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru and author of Migration, Food Security and Development: Insights from Rural India (Cambridge University Press, 2023). Arslan Wali Khan is a doctoral candidate at the School of Social Sciences, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru.]*

## LETTERS

### Genocide of Children

Gaza's Ministry of Health on September 15 released a document containing the names and ages of Palestinians killed by Israel's assault since the Hamas-led October 7 attack, an incomplete list that nonetheless runs 649 pages—the first 14 of which are filled with the names of babies.

The list, published to the health ministry's Telegram account, is limited to those for whom Gaza officials had information—over 34,000 people—and the count stops on August 31. The current death toll, according to the ministry, is close to 42,000, but experts believe that figure is likely a gross undercount.

The new document is a testament to the devastating impact Israel's US-backed war has had on Gaza's population, particularly children. According to Gaza officials, children make up a third of those killed since October 7.

The Gaza Health Ministry's statistics are considered credible by independent watchdogs and have been cited internally by US officials, notwithstanding President Joe Biden's public questioning of the data.

Trita Parsi, executive vice president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, wrote that the newly published list highlights "what differentiates Gaza".

"It's a genocide of children since their proportion is unprecedented,"

Parsi wrote, adding that the "US, UK, and Germany arm and support the genocide."

### Jake Johnson, Common Dreams Democracy shifted to Epistocracy?

Is India's democracy, the largest people's democracy in the world, limited to the political leaders in power? Various anti-people incidents attached to corruption, violence, threats, even murder, etc. vividly witness its limitation. The voice of people is being dishonoured and ignored in some cases, i.e., the recent incident of institutionalized brutal rape and murder of a trainee postgraduate lady doctor at R G Kar Medical College and hospital, Kolkata.

Many happenings and policies of the government remind 'an old saying that democracy is the worst form of government, except for all of the others. Or putting it another way: the best form of government is a benevolent and knowledgeable dictator, except for the problem of finding a good and wise leader. Whatever democracy's strengths, they are relative, not absolute, and they are contingent on context—namely, the people being governed, the people governing, and the underlying institutions'.

It is evident that the majority of people in India are "rationally ignorant" about politics and public policy. They are satisfied with some incentive through acquiring low-cost infor-

mation that is perceived to be relatively accurate. But the dictators of democracy from the ruling political party usually demand that they use mostly to prioritise people, 'what they want'.

India's democracy is limited and exploited by interest groups and politicians in opposition to a rationally ignorant general public. It has space for interest groups to engage in the political trade controlled and managed by politicians. The monopoly power within India's 'political markets and high transaction costs (preventing beneficial trades)' are leading to political inefficiency. 'In contrast, Wittman (1995) argues that democratic markets are generally "efficient" compared to other forms of governance, including economic markets'.

Populism, 'a social and political response of ordinary people to cultural pressures and public policies', in India's democratic politics has been largely attached to, and it is a shortfall obviously because it is a drawback for effective self-governance—'from ignorance and envy to paranoia and xenophobia'. Populism has practically evil effects 'to diminish civic and economic liberties, reducing self-governance'.

Indian democracy has been transferred to 'Epistocracy'.

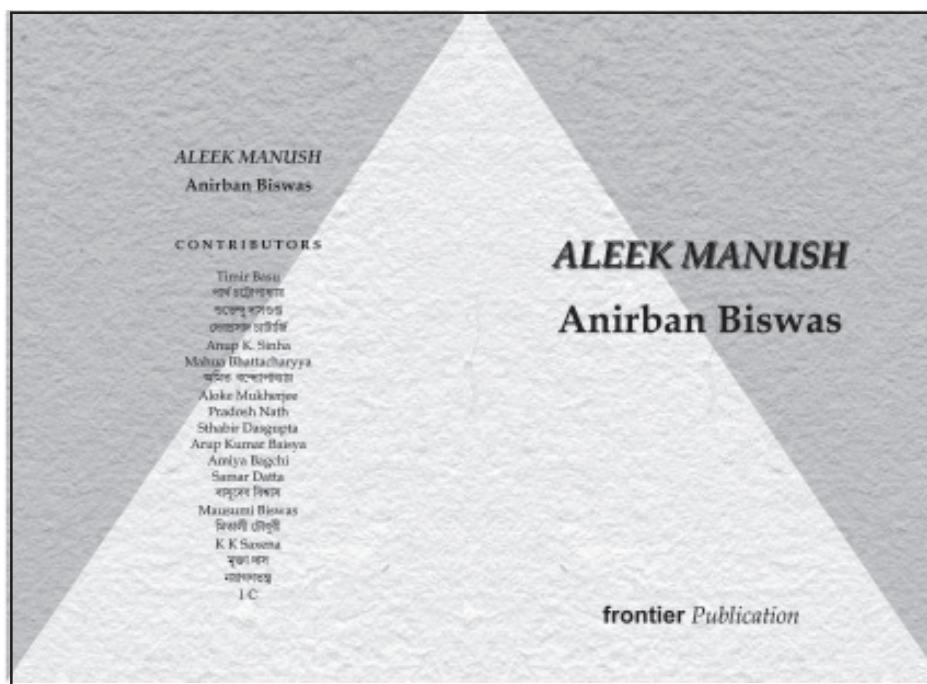
**Harashankar Adhikary**

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