

# frontier

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## *'A Sigh of Relief?'*

**M**ODI RETAINS HIS AUTHORITY FOR THE THIRD TERM. THE moot question is whether Muslims in India are now feeling more secure about their future. Modi has not succeeded in getting an absolute majority in parliament. He now heads a coalition government with two regional outfits having dubious distinction of being called 'fair weather birds'.

Right from the start of Modi's first term in 2014, Muslims were targeted from unprecedented degree of humiliation, disenfranchisement and naked brutalisation by both state and non-state actors. The Modi brigade openly described Muslims as traitors, infiltrators, threats to Hindus and the like. The expectation among Muslims across the country is that the 'worst is hopefully over'. But Modi is unlikely to change his course. He knows well how to tame his coalition partners who are mere passengers in the new cabinet and they will be happy to have special package for their states, without bothering much about Modi's hidden agenda or open agenda. Money talks and it will allow Modi to talk in his own way.

During the election campaign, Modi and his party colleagues were accused of hate speech and peddling anti-Muslim tropes. Sometimes Modi's electioneering reached the border of vulgarity as he would identify the Muslim community as one having more children. Some of his NDA partners apparently look secular but they never raised any objection to Modi's blatant attempt to communalise polity. It is too early to opine that India's Muslims have reasons 'to heave a sigh of relief'.

Many think the 'Verdict 2024' will put a brake on the BJP-ruled states on their notorious programme of carrying out 'bulldozer justice'. Over the past decade in almost all BJP-ruled states, thousands of Muslim houses and shops were demolished by bulldozers after their owners committed minor offences. For one thing the authorities targeted only Muslim-owned properties, overlooking illegal structures owned by non-Muslims. Several legal experts, including former judges, called the so-called 'bulldozer justice' outright unlawful.

Until recently, senior BJP leaders said the Modi government was in the process of implementing a National Register of Citizens or NRC—a list of Indians who can prove their citizenship by providing documentation. In reality the NRC project is designed to designate many Indian Muslims as illegal foreigners. At one stage there was wide-spread protests against NRC and CAA—Citizenship Amendment Act. What has happened in Assam in

the name of detecting illegal foreigners is known to everybody. Thousands of people are languishing in detention camps in sub-human conditions. Here fascism is in action.

As for BJP-ruled states Modi's coalition partners matter little in framing policies. So they will go according to script prepared by their ideologues, unless the Opposition makes concerted efforts to confront Modi's 'diluted saffron regime' in its totality. The way they are protesting against the massive Exam scam makes little sense. They just finish their duty by making posts on social media.

Every year, over 2 million students in India battle it out to get one of just 110,000 available spots to study medicine. Of the total seats, around 60,000 are in state universities with the rest in private colleges. Half the total seats are reserved for students from lower-income backgrounds. The exam irregularities have plunged hundreds of thousands of medical aspirants into career uncertainty. The opposition has failed to capitalise on this issue allowing the new Modi government to do business as usual.

The fact is that this exam scam is actually related to youth unemploy-

ment. Joblessness is highest among those aged 15-29 and also remains persistently high for those with a formal education. The share of educated youth among the unemployed rose from 54.2 percent in 2000 to 65.7 percent in 2022. This unemployment factor played a crucial role in thwarting Modi's chariot in the 2024 electoral race though the opposition INDIA bloc failed to mobilise people against Modi on this burning question of unemployment, rather life and death question for hundreds of thousands of middle class and lower middleclass families. □□□

25-06-2024

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## COMMENT

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### Julian Assange Is Free

WIKILEAKS FOUNDER JULIAN Assange on June 24 reached a deal with the US government, agreeing to plead guilty to one felony related to the disclosure of national security information in exchange for his release from Belmarsh Prison in the United Kingdom.

Assange faced the risk of spending the rest of his life in US prison if convicted of Espionage Act and Computer Fraud and Abuse Act charges for publishing classified material including the "Collateral Murder" video and the Afghan and Iraq war logs. Before Belmarsh, he spent seven years in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London with asylum protections.

"Julian Assange is free," WikiLeaks declared on the social media platform X, confirming that he left Belmarsh Monday [June 24] after having spent 1,901 days there, locked in a small cell for 23 hours a day.

"He was granted bail by the High Court in London and was released at Stanstead Airport during the afternoon, where he boarded a plane and departed the UK," WikiLeaks said. "This is the result of a global campaign that spanned grassroots

organisers, press freedom campaigners, legislators, and leaders from across the political spectrum, all the way to the United Nations."

The news of Assange's release was celebrated by people around the world, who also blasted the US for continuing to pursue charges against him and the UK for going along with it.

Seth Stern, advocacy director at the Freedom of the Press Foundation, said that "it's good news that the Department of Justice [DOJ] is putting an end to this embarrassing saga. But it's alarming that the Biden administration felt the need to extract a guilty plea for the purported crime of obtaining and publishing government secrets." As opposed to receiving a deserved pardon.... the persecution of Assange has been indicative of the guiding principle of American foreign policy these days: Prosecute the whistleblowers exposing war crimes while funding Israeli war criminals in an on-going attempt at genocide against occupied Palestine.

"The American administration could've easily just dropped the case but chose to instead legitimise the criminalisation of routine journalistic

conduct and encourage future administrations to follow suit".

Leftist Colombian President Gustavo Petro said in a statement: "I congratulate Julian Assange on his freedom. Assange's eternal imprisonment and torture was an attack on press freedom on a global scale. Denouncing the massacre of civilians in Iraq by the US war machine was his 'crime'; now the massacre is repeated in Gaza I invite Julian and his wife Stella to visit Colombia and let's take action for true freedom."

Julian Assange will finally be free. While great news, this has been over a decade of his life wasted by US overreach.

Journalism is not a crime. Pursuing Assange was anti-democratic, anti-press freedom, and the charges should have been dropped.

One of the most horrific videos published by WikiLeaks was called "Collateral Murder," footage of the US military opening fire on a group of unarmed civilians—including Reuters journalists—in Baghdad. While Julian has been in captivity for the past 14 years, the war criminals that destroyed Iraq walked free. Many are still in government positions today or living off the profits of weapons contracts. □□□

[Contributed by Common Dreams]

## NOTE

## No Muslim in Modi Cabinet

**Sourish Ghosh writes:**

**M**ODI IS PROBABLY THE first Prime Minister of India who has delivered so many hate speeches during election campaigns. Now as he begins his third term as a Prime Minister; it is not surprising that there is no Muslim representation in his 71-member cabinet. The saffron Troll Army and cadres are justifying it on the ground that Muslims do not support Modi and so they should not expect a representation. But Modi as a Prime Minister of India should have been inclusive as constitutionally he is the Prime Minister of every individual of this country and he should have dissociated himself from being a mere leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Even the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat has been critical of his approach and reminded him of 'rajdharm' which once Atal Bihari Vajpayee did during Gujarat riots in 2002. This is also an RSS strategy to clean its image and distance itself from Modi's whataboutery. The Muslims in India especially under Modi is a potential example of Homo Sacer in Agambenian state of exception.

Giorgio Agamben, an Italian philosopher, has theorised the relationship between the sovereign and the subject as two sides of the puzzle. On one side, there is the functioning of democratic politics which necessarily has assumed the issue of rights based on liberal consensus. On the other side there lies the incessant production of naked life to its minimum essentials; a "spectral lump" devoid of all rights, but who at the same time has to be located in the interstices of the juridical. Agamben excavates ancient Roman law to find the figure of Homo Sacer ('sacer' here means both sacred and cursed: the Latin sacrificium/sacr/sacer).

Borrowing the concept from Pompeius Festus, Agamben theorises the Homo Sacer as the epitome of extreme marginality, one who cannot be sacrificed to the gods, as his death is of no value to them, but who can be killed with indemnity because he enjoys no legal protection. Homo Sacer is located exterior with respect to human order and annihilation of such life does not mean homicide as killing here does not involve law, it does not indicate lawlessness. So, they can be tormented, jeered, criticised (remember Tablighi Jamaat issue during the pandemic) and even killed at will (remember Mohammad Akhlaq and others) and there will be no shock and awe or cry for justice. This is the state of exception which the BJP government has created in India which advertently seeks to create a model of ethnic democracy which will be similar to that of Israel where enemy can be demonstrated and their disparagement will only consolidate the majority.

Although there has been resistance and protest from within the Muslim communities (especially during Anti-NRC and CAA movement) and also from certain sections of intellectuals and left parties but majority of the opposition have either demonstrated lukewarm protest or tried to maintain a balance as they were concerned about their majority vote bank which the BJP had manage to polarise and even rally behind its propaganda. Modi is making his intention clear in his third term as he took this historic decision of not keeping any Muslim representatives in the cabinet. Actually, he wanted to send a message to the Muslim community that he will not be lenient against his dissenters and will continue to play this polarisation game. □□□

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## The Impasse of the European Left

*Marcello Musto*

**T**HE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC crisis traversing Europe has not only led to the advance of populist, xenophobic and far-Right forces. At the same time, it has prompted major struggles and protest demonstrations against the austerity measures imposed by the European Commission and implemented by national governments.

Especially in southern Europe, this has encouraged a renaissance of the radical Left, as well as notable electoral breakthroughs. Starting from 2010, Greece, Spain and Portugal, along with, in a lesser key, other countries, have been the scene of imposing mass mobilisations against neoliberal policies.

At a political level, the anti-capitalist Left stuck to its course of rebuilding and regrouping its forces in the field. New formations inspired by pluralism took shape and came to constitute a wide arc of political subjects, at the same time securing greater democracy through the principle of 'one person, one vote'.

In 1999 the Left Bloc (BE) was funded in Portugal and in 2004 Synaspismos and a range of other leftist forces in Greece came together to form Syriza, the Coalition of the Radical Left. A few years later, the most radical components of the German SPD and the French Socialist Party (PS)3131 Oskar Lafontaine's cartel Labour and Social Justice–The Electoral Alternative (WASG) came into being in 2005, and the foundation of the Parti de Gauche (PG) in France under the leadership of Jean-Luc Mélenchon was announced in November 2008. This encouraged the launch of The Left (Die Linke–DL)

in Germany in 2007 and of the Left Front (FdG) in France in 2008, which was followed by La France Insoumise in 2016. The year 2014 saw the emergence of Podemos in Spain.

The plural model, so different from the monolithic, 'democratic centralist' party of the twentieth-century Communist movement, quickly spread to most forces of the European radical Left. The most successful experiments have been not so much those that simply unify small pre-existing groups and organisations as genuine recompositions driven by the need to involve the vast, scattered network of social subjects and to weave together different forms of struggle. This approach has been victorious in so far as it has attracted new forces, drawing in young people, bringing back disillusioned militants and assisting the electoral advance of the newly created parties.

But the reality in Europe was very heterogeneous. In the Iberian Peninsula and the Mediterranean Basin—with the exception of Italy—the radical Left has expanded significantly in recent years. In Central Europe, the radical Left has managed to retain a decent electoral strength only in some nations. In the Nordic countries, it has defended the positions it secured after 1989 (around 10% at the polls), but it has proved incapable of attracting the diffuse popular discontent, which has been captured by the extreme Right instead. The main problem for the radical Left remains further east, however, where it is virtually non-existent and incapable of moving beyond the spectre of 'actually existing socialism'. In these circumstances,

the eastward expansion of the EU has decisively shifted the political centre of gravity to the right, as one can see from the rigidly extreme positions taken by East European governments in relation to economy and migration.

The conversion of radical Left parties into broader, more plural organisations has been useful in reducing their fragmentation, but it has certainly not solved their political problems.

The outcome of the negotiations between Tsipras and the Eurogroup in Greece made it abundantly clear that, as soon as a left-wing party wins elections and seeks to implement alternative economic policies, the Brussels institutions are ready to intervene and put a stop to them. In the 1990s, unconditional acceptance of the neoliberal credo aligned the forces of European social democracy with the parties of the centre-right. Today, by contrast, when a party of the radical Left comes to power, the Troika itself steps in to prevent the new government from tampering with its economic directives. To win elections is not enough; the European Union has become a cornerstone of neoliberal capitalism.

The government option for the forces of the radical left should be considered only if the conditions are present to implement an economic programme that clearly breaks with the austerity policies of the last decade and today with an unambiguous position against war and militarism. Any other decision would mean not having learnt the lessons of recent years, when the policies pursued by Socialist-led governments compromised the credibility of the radical Left among the working classes, social movements and the weakest sections of society.

Faced with unemployment that in some countries has reached levels

not seen since the war, it has become a priority to launch an ambitious plan for labour, supported by public investment, with sustainable development as its guiding principle. This should go together with a clear change of direction regarding the job insecurity that has marked all the latest labour-market 'reforms'; legislation should also be introduced to set a minimum threshold below which wages cannot be allowed to fall. Such measures would make it possible once again for young people to plan their future. There should also be a cut in working hours and a lowering of the retirement age, thereby restoring some elements of social justice to counter the unequal division of wealth that has continually grown under the neoliberal regime.

To confront the dramatic rise in unemployment, the parties of the radical Left should promote measures that tend to establish a citizenship income and basic forms of support for the less well-off—from a right to housing through transport concessions to free education—in such a way as to combat poverty and the ever more widespread social exclusion. At the same time, it is essential to reverse the privatisation processes that have marked the counter-revolution of the last few decades. All the common goods

transformed from community services into means of generating profits for the few should be restored to public ownership and control.

As regards the funding of such reforms, this could come from a tax on capital and on the non-productive activity of large corporations, as well as on financial transactions and income. At a continental level, a real alternative is conceivable only if a broad spectrum of political and social forces is capable of fighting for and achieving a European conference on the restructuring of public debt.

An alternative politics does not allow shortcuts. It is necessary to build new organisations—the Left needs these as much as it did in the twentieth century: organisations that have an extensive presence in workplaces; organisations that strive to unify the struggles of the workers and subaltern classes, at a time when these have never been more fragmented; organisations whose local structures are capable of giving immediate answers (even before legislation for general improvements) to the dramatic problems resulting from poverty and social exclusion. It will also help this to happen if the Left draws again on forms of social resistance and solidarity practised by the workers' movement in other historical epochs.

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New priorities also need to be defined, especially a real gender equality and thorough political training of younger members. The lodestar for such work, in an age when democracy is hostage to technocratic organisms, is the encouragement of rank-and-file participation and the development of social struggles.

The only initiatives of the radical Left that can really aspire to change the course of events have a single road before them: to build a new social bloc capable of stimulating mass opposition to the policies initiated by the Maastricht Treaty, and therefore to change at the roots the dominant economic approaches in today's Europe. Following the end of World War II, the path has never been more uphill. □□□

## VERDICT 2024

### Coalition Culture is Normal in Indian Democracy

*Partha Chatterjee*

**D**ISMISSING DESCRIPTIONS of the election results as a setback for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the new coalition government led by Narendra Modi has begun its term with brave pronouncements of continuity. Every spokesperson and media ally is repeating the victory chant that Modi is only the second prime

minister after Jawaharlal Nehru to be elected for a third term.

One may, of course, quibble with that claim since, if one includes multiparty governments, Nehru was actually prime minister of India for four terms from 1946 to his death in 1964. Be that as it may, continuity has been projected in Modi retaining most of his senior ministers in their

previous ministries as well as key personnel in the Prime Minister's Office. Demands from alliance partners for plum cabinet posts have been warded off by promises of special favours for their states. Announcements are coming thick and fast of how the unfinished development agenda of the last term will now be taken forward vigorously.

What is being avoided is a comparison with the BJP's position in the previous Lok Sabha. The party has actually lost 63 seats in the Lok Sabha, depriving it of its majority.

Most of these losses have occurred in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Karnataka. The damage has been only slightly compensated by surprising gains in Odisha. The BJP now depends on its National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partners, especially the Telugu Desam Party, the Janata Dal (United), and the Lok Janshakti Party, to hold a majority in the Lok Sabha. On the other hand, the INDIA bloc has gained substantially to become a credible opposition force in the Lower House. The Congress has increased its strength by 47 seats and the Samajwadi Party by 32. Clearly, the BJP will no longer be able to steamroll bills without discussion, refuse to answer questions, ignore the parliamentary committees or expel dozens of members at will. That is certainly a hopeful sign for this principal democratic institution.

Has the Modi magic faded? One must remember that not every politician with charismatic potential is necessarily able to achieve mass popularity. Such success crucially depends on specific structural conditions that pave the way for a leader to assume a Caesar-like position of standing above fractious divisions to represent in his or her person the unity of the people. That position was held by Jawaharlal Nehru in the 1950s, Indira Gandhi in the early 1970s, and Narendra Modi since 2014.

What are those structural conditions? They emerge in situations in which the major social forces vying for power are locked in a tussle that cannot be resolved one way or the other. When the entire polity appears poised on the brink of deadly conflict and collapse, a Caesarist leader takes charge from above, without identifying with any particular contending force, and expresses the unity of the nation-state and its oneness with the people as a whole. In Nehru's case,

he first fought back a challenge from the conservative right wing of the Congress to assert his authority over both government and party. But although there were Congress governments in virtually every state, they were commanded by powerful regional bosses and the party was rife with factional squabbles.

Nehru rose above all of them. With British owners of prominent business houses handing over their stocks to Indian capitalists, the latter were still finding their feet in the new political terrain. On the other hand, the former heads of princely states and large landowners were a considerable force on the ground. Nehru had decided on a path of rapid industrialisation led by the public sector. He stood above the fray of political and class conflict, handed over the contentious task of economic decision-making to experts in the Planning Commission and allowed the bureaucracy drawn from the upper middle class to hold the balance of power. Nehru himself claimed to represent the nation as a whole.

Indira Gandhi, on the other hand, adopted a populist path which identified her enemies as conservative party bosses who stood against her efforts to carry out radical progressive reforms. Her enemies, she announced, were the people's enemies. She split the party in 1969, won a landslide election victory and a war against Pakistan in 1971, and emerged as a leader who would defend the people against its enemies.

When the entire polity appears poised on the brink of deadly conflict and collapse, a Caesarist leader takes charge from above, without identifying with any particular contending force, and expresses the unity of the nation-state and its oneness with the people as a whole.

Narendra Modi appeared in 2014

with the image of a decisive leader who had turned Gujarat into an industrial power house. Shaking off allegations of complicity in the 2002 killings of Muslims, he had persuaded major companies from India and abroad to invest in the state and championed Gujarati pride. Big business loved him; so did the upper middle class and the English-language media. His campaign in the 2014 elections did not stress BJP's Hindutva politics. Instead, he claimed to stand for a development path that included everyone: "sab ka saath, sab ka vikas." One of the first things he did after taking office was abolish the Planning Commission—that symbol of the Nehruvian command economy. Unfortunately, other promises of pro-business reform had to wait because the global economic climate could not sustain the dizzy growth rates of the previous decade.

The general election of 2019 was different. The BJP had suffered several reverses in state elections. The fantastic claims made in defence of the senseless demonetisation decision had been shown to be false: all that it had achieved was harassment of ordinary people and untold misery for millions struggling to survive in the informal economy. Barely weeks before the parliamentary elections, a warlike situation was created on the India-Pakistan border following a terrorist attack on soldiers in Kashmir, with Indian bombing attacks inside Pakistan territory and war planes brought down on both sides. The two neighbours seemed to be on the brink of a nuclear exchange.

Modi emerged as the defender of a nation besieged by its enemies, both external and internal. This time Modi appeared in a classic populist role, drawing a line between the patriotic people and its enemies and vowing to defend the former and vanquish the latter.

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No less important than his role as the guarantor of development benefits for all was Modi's populist image as the unifier of Hindus against troublesome minorities.

Henceforth, Modi's image would become intertwined with the BJP's Hindutva agenda. One of the first acts of the new government in 2019 was the abrogation of Article 370, the separation of Ladakh and the demotion of Jammu and Kashmir to the status of a Union Territory. This had been a long-standing demand of the Jana Sangh-BJP which rejected what it called the special treatment given to the Muslim-majority state during constitutional negotiations over its joining the Indian Union.

Around the same time, the triple talaq provision for divorce in Muslim personal law was declared illegal and made a criminal offence. The Citizenship Act was amended to allow fast-track citizenship to non-Muslim refugees from neighbouring countries—the first time that Indian citizenship was qualified by religion.

Modi became increasingly identified with Hindutva causes such as the consecration and opening of the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya. He had in 2023 led elaborate religious rituals at the opening of the new Parliament building in New Delhi; much like a sovereign Hindu monarch might have done in an earlier age. During the 2024 campaign he even suggested that he was not the biological son of his mother but a prophet sent by god to serve earthly humans. Alongside, he campaigned in various state elections using provocative rhetoric against Muslim infiltrators, the alleged Muslim proclivity for high birth rates and their willingness to be used as vote banks. No less important than his role as the guarantor of development benefits for all was Modi's populist image as the unifier of Hindus against

troublesome minorities. The magic did not work this time.

Instead, voters paid more attention to other issues such as joblessness and consumer inflation. Various local grievances came to the fore such as the inaccessibility and haughtiness of ministers and MPs or the imposition by the central BJP leadership of inappropriate candidates. These, in turn, led to factional quarrels and disaffection in the BJP ranks.

In short, unlike 2014 or 2019, there was no Modi wave across the entire northern and western regions; instead, regional and local considerations became predominant. In some states, such as Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand or Himachal Pradesh, these local factors still worked in favour of the BJP. In others, the BJP was routed.

It would be a huge mistake [...] to conclude from the 2024 election results that the appeal of Hindutva politics, working at the level of everyday cultural practice, has suddenly evaporated. It could certainly resurface at the next extraordinary moment.

Apparently, there were indications after the first two phases of voting that the BJP's local managers had failed to bring out the vote. The lack of enthusiasm could not be attributed entirely to the heat wave sweeping across north India. In the remaining phases, Modi's rhetoric became more and more strident. His speeches cut no ice.

This points to the important truth that political leaders, no matter how charismatic, cannot sway the masses at will.

The election this time was a normal election, as opposed to a wave election. That is to say, there was no single overwhelming reason that drove people to choose between this and that candidate. There were a variety of considerations that

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played out differently in different states and regions. That is indeed how it should be in normal democracies, especially in one of India's size and social heterogeneity. After two extraordinary elections, the country has returned to its normal mode of choosing a government at the centre.

Following the end of Congress dominance, India was ruled during the entire period from 1989 to 2014 by coalition governments. Some of them were unstable and short-lived, but others completed their full terms.

Not only that, scholars of Indian politics know that even in the heyday of Congress dominance in the Nehru era, when the party ruled nearly every state in the country, the Congress itself was, as Rajni Kothari pointed out many years ago, a coalition of many regional blocs and social interests led by powerful local leaders rather than a centralised party.

Coalitional politics is in fact the normal form of Indian democracy.

This was implicitly acknowledged by the BJP too when it chose to keep several small parties in the ruling NDA front in the first two Modi terms despite having a majority on its own, because otherwise several major states would have gone unrepresented in his cabinet.

Just as coalitions are perfectly normal at the centre, the regional spread of ruling parties makes it necessary that there be an equitable distribution of powers between the centre and the states.

But coalition politics is not merely about multi-party governments at the centre. It is also thoroughly implicated in the question of the federal balance of power. Although both the BJP and the Congress are considered all-India parties, their effective areas of influence are regional. Despite its recent successes in Karnataka, Tripura and Odisha, the BJP is still overwhelmingly a party of northern and western India. The Congress too has little influence in Tamil Nadu, Odisha, West Bengal or Bihar. The other parties, even though they may be in power in particular states, have next to no presence elsewhere.

It should follow that just as coalitions are perfectly normal at the centre, the regional spread of ruling parties makes it necessary that there

be an equitable distribution of powers between the centre and the states. This truth has receded from view in recent years. Given the relentless push towards centralisation of both party and government under Modi's leadership and the uncoordinated and feeble protests by regional ruling parties against inadequate financial transfers from the centre and blatant interference by governors, the federal balance is now heavily tilted in favour of New Delhi. The recent elections provide an opportunity to push for a fairer balance.

Since coalitional politics is viewed with such horror by the all-India middle class, it is worth pointing out that most European democracies have worked with coalition governments for decades. Even in the United States, whose electoral system discourages third party candidates at every level, the Republican and Democratic parties have always been broad coalitions of varied regional and social interests..

The opposition INDIA bloc may take some credit for its vastly improved performance. But neither in programmatic clarity nor in its internal cohesion is it strong enough to oust the NDA from power. The two long marches carried out by Rahul Gandhi apparently did succeed in highlighting the issues of joblessness and price rise. But attempts to arrive at a common programme have not advanced. Given their episodic and ill-prepared efforts at working together as a front, the INDIA constituents have been unable to overcome feelings of suspicion and distrust about each other's intentions. This leaves the bloc open to disruption by a wily and immensely resourceful ruling party.

One way of developing a more cohesive internal working relationship within the INDIA front in Parliament might be to nominate a shadow cabinet. If each major min-

istry is watched over routinely and continuously by an assigned INDIA bloc MP, it would make for a much more substantive and powerful criticism of government than the endless disruptions of proceedings which have become the usual form of protest in recent years.

The second question that must be addressed urgently is that of a more equitable distribution of powers between the centre and the states. The 1980s saw a series of proposals from opposition parties that argued for the curbing of the powers of the governor, greater financial autonomy for states, an end to arbitrary discretionary transfers from the centre to the states and the formation of an Inter-State Council consisting of the prime minister and all chief ministers that must meet at least twice a year. Some of these proposals were indeed acted upon for a while; others were pushed into oblivion.

It is certainly time to press for a functioning Inter-State Council. In the absence of a more equitable distribution of financial resources, where the balance has been further tilted in favour of the centre after the GST came into operation, individual states have often seized political opportunities to extract discretionary transfers and special packages for their own benefit, thus greatly increasing the centre's arbitrary powers. On the other hand, the richer states keep complaining that whereas they contribute the larger share of revenues, they are deprived of equivalent allocations. A more systematic and equitable formula for federal financial transfers is definitely an urgent need. □□□

[Courtesy: The India Forum]

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COLLEGE SQUARE



## WOMAN AS REASON

## Hindutva Violence and Women

*Joydip Ghosal*

**H**INDUTVA AND VIOLENCE Against Women by Brinda Karat (Publisher: Speaking Tiger) is a detailed exposition on the undemocratic nature of the Hindutva ecosystem. This fundamentally communal regime is also trying to legitimise sexual violence which is directed against the women. As an activist she brings to the fore in this monograph how this regressive ecosystem draws its strength from misogynistic ideologues. According to her the religious identities of the perpetrators and the victims determine the approach of the establishment. The law enforcing agencies, the courts also get impacted by those identities. The political supremacy of Hindutva also unleashed a profound influence upon the discourse since 2014.

This book is dedicated to those who resist the bulldozers of majoritarian injustice. On August 15, 2022 when India celebrated seventy-five years of her independence Prime Minister in his speech made a specific reference to women. "Can we not pledge to get rid of every behaviour and culture that humiliates and demeans women in our daily life?" A few hours later eleven men who were convicted of gang rape, murders walked out of the prison in Godhra. They had been granted remission. This book points out that central home ministry led by Amit Shah examined their cases. These men were garlanded. According to the author in such a sensitive case no one would dare sanction without the explicit permission of the supreme leader of the government. In an affidavit the Gujarat government told the Supreme Court that its decision

to grant premature release as part of the celebration of "Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav" had the approval of the central government. The author here asks the pertinent question why the supreme leader of the country who asks fellow countrymen to make a pledge to get rid of very behaviour that humiliates and demeans women does not castigate the 'sickening felicitation' of those perpetrators. The author had been involved with the work of All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA). As an activist she witnessed innumerable cases of the vilest brutality. Leaders across political spectrum use languages which are misogynist and sexist in nature. As an activist she fought against the promotion of cultural set-up which objectified women. She also struggled hard against the commodification of women. She enunciated that as the Dalit and Adivasi women are at the tri-junction of patriarchy, caste and class they are the victims of extreme levels of cruelties. She draws attention to the fact that equally prevalent is the culture that attempts to relegate abuse and domestic violence against women within the 'private sphere' where speaking about that is considered taboo. But she is driven by the question what makes the Bilkis Bano case a manifestation of the changing realities happening in the framework of prevention of violence, punishment for the same and rehabilitation for the victim? This book delves deeper into the proceedings that made it possible for the perpetrators to get themselves released. She urges the readers that instead of pondering upon the case in an isolated way one needs to place it within the broader frame-

work. This book peels off the internal logic of majoritarian framework of politics. It commences as demonisation of a particular community but it extends to other communities who do not fit into the framework designed by majoritarian politics.

It is quite obvious that a political party which is at the helm of affairs would seek to execute its own policy and agenda. But Brinda Karat rightly points out that a fundamentally altered situation in India is witnessed by its citizen because of the nature of agenda set by RSS and BJP. Thus the slogan of establishment of 'Hindu Supremacy' militates against the Constitution of India. The author shows that this majority is not linked to democratic majority. These days this exponential growth of majoritarianism is based upon sectarian religious identity. It launches its attack on other beliefs. This type of majoritarianism has earned many brownie points. A parliamentary majority has been used to undermine the basic tenets of Constitution. This majoritarianism is marching towards the fulfilment of narrow agenda i.e. Hindutva. This has left serious implication upon women's autonomy, rights based framework and equality. All these are intrinsically linked to the equal democratic rights enshrined in the Constitution. According to the author in the last decade people have witnessed rapid growth of ideologies linked to the Hindutva project which directly affects women. With the homogenisation of expressions and beliefs it seeks to build an overarching identity. The author terms anti-minority bigotry, a basic tenet of Hindutva 'communal majoritarianism.'

The author identifies here certain vital aspects which have direct bearing on the struggle for justice for women against violence-the appoint-

ment to important positions of those whose only merit is loyalty to a particular ideology, the subversion of democratic institutions. The ideological alignment of certain section of judiciary gravely undermines the principle of justice. Eco-system is a favourite phrase of Sangh Parivar. They use the term to denigrate left and liberals. The author clearly shows that according to Hindutva ideologues lesson used to empower children against sexual abuses is tantamount to evil. According to them it is a part of left eco-system. The religious identity of perpetrators and victims also play pivotal role in communalised eco- system. Government grants impunity to perpetrators of sexual crimes when such history-sheeters belonging to majority community are allowed to walk away.

In this book one gets a detailed and comprehensive picture of Bilkis Bano case. A judicial intervention salvaged justice from getting trampled by government order. But it brings

forth a glaring fact – the weakening of institutional foundation of justice.

The author enunciates that she is against death sentence because of its arbitrary and subjective nature. The Nirbhaya case qualified 'the rarest of rare category'. But the Bilkis case, horrible and macabre did not fit that category.

In cases where stringent punishments were delivered the instances of collective conscience were given. The expression of public opinion in favour or against influenced the court and courts admitted that. The author here raises a pertinent question. In a political set up where 'collective conscience' can be moulded such reasoning can lead to grave injustice. On the other hand if the 'collective conscience' is suppressed or nowhere to be seen influenced by the identity of the accused or victim will the punishment be less? With the author people are quite sure that in today's political scenario this question is gaining relevance. In yester

years ruling dispensation even if colluded with the elites would use guiles to do it. "Now even such pretense is dispensed with."

The author visited Manipur and detailed her impression after the mayhem. There were many complexities and differing perceptions. Political solution is the urgent requirement. Dialogue between communities needed to be conducted. But chief minister was the biggest hurdle. So demand for his resignation was resonated across the communities.

Her empathy for the women who had to bear the dehumanising impact of such divisive politics is also evident in the book. Author agrees with the view of Nehru that the communalism of majority community is more dangerous than the communalism of minority community because it masquerades as nationalism. So the struggle for advance of a rights based framework was always in confrontation with fundamentalist forces. □□□

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#### MAKE AND BREAK

## Paintings of Debjani Dakshit Dasgupta

*Atanu Basu*

**D**EBJANI, IN CONVENTIONAL sense of the term, can hardly be called to have a solid "professional training", save and except possibly her three years' training in Indian Society of Oriental Art. Next few years Debjani Dakshit Dasgupta had undergone serious apprenticeship under experts in the field. In south Kolkata's Charubason Gallery's Sunayani Chitrashala hall she presented her art works in a solo exhibition. For the last 20 years or so, she was into paintings; in this latest exhibition she had showcased her 15 paintings for the delight of the viewers. Her Paintings were mostly in acrylic and also in mixed media. One can discern both graphic

and quality in her paintings. Her skill in both paper and canvas is aptly documented through the exhibits in this hall.

In some of her paintings, she used only the middle portion of the space, surrounded by empty space, while in some others, she used the top to bottom approach, the composition appearing only at the bottom of the paper or canvas. She looked at from various angles her object of study, yet one would not be able to locate or pinpoint a typical approach revealing a feminist view through a woman's prism. One would rather encounter oneness, an inner expanse that characterises her paintings.

When one looks at from an abstract or an esoteric viewpoint, art cannot be put into silos like "national" or "international". To do a proper justice to it, it should be called "materialistic" centered on nature. Human beings are intermingled and subsumed in nature itself, became a part of it; the artists must depict these features in her art lest her works become asocial. In Debjani's paintings, this nature-centricity became all pervasive. In the case of composition, not in every occasion, it may not reveal its inner core so easily. From the viewpoint of grammar of composition, her stylisation, angle of vision and other important aspects of components touched the chords of her viewers and sublimed the technicalities to appeal to one's aesthetic sense.

For landscapes, she uses sky, sometimes empty spaces at the top

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while huts, tenements appear horizontally, perhaps as a compensation in a very limited manner.

The human figures in her paintings invariably remind one about Somnath Hore or Jainul Abedin. "Landscape I", rendered in mix media, charcoal and brushing style was simply charming. "The night bloom" (from the album of "My Bagicha") was not symbolised in any particular sense, yet it harbours an intense symbol in its own right. Here the combination of nature, moon and nightmares created an atmosphere of combustion feelings among the viewers. The absence of flowers generated a glimpse of flowers. Hidden in a subtle manner, generated a kind of detachment and also dissolution, which expressed the Nature in a different way.

Her work, "Remains" in acrylic, dry pastel clearly conveys a message. In the backdrop of a pale sky, hillocks, in mystic darkness, one finds a skeleton lying in the valley region, though one was not sure whether the place was a crematory or a burial ground. According to Debjani, "this is the last stage of life". One has doubts whether the work would convey such a theme.

Wings were another of her theme. She used a pair of them, sometimes even a part of it. Wings or any parts thereof, with some compositional errors might be thought-provoking. Did she depict a desire of flying high? The symbolic representations, in these cases are too heavy. She did not put any limit, positive or otherwise, nor did she convey any

specific, but a sublime pain was what the viewers would have to grapple with. This would invariably remind one of Somnath Hore's "pain".

Her work, "Trapped" is completely different. But one wonders, why, apparently quite suddenly, she had shunned realism and took recourse to a deflated eye socket. The sheer horror of it generates an eerie feeling.

In a strange exhibit one sees a big chopper, in deep darkness depicting a story whose underlying theme appears to be destruction of evils. She had presented her solo, lonely world in her own way, might be inspired by some personal language of art, which she questioned from time to time. □□□

## THE MIGRANT STORY

### Back from a Delhi 'Heat Ward'

**Anumeha Yadav**

*[Unconscious, frothing in the mouth, holding ice packs: Migrant workers are the biggest casualty of India's worst heat wave.]*

**J**UNE 20 AFTERNOON. Thursday. The busy campus of Safdarjung hospital had patients and attendants trying to protect themselves from the searing heat in the shade of the building and under trees. A tall security guard, in a black and red uniform, stepped out of the hospital's new emergency block and called out: "Rohit ke saath kaun-Rohit ke saath kaun? Who is with Rohit?" he repeated. No one responded.

Rohit, who is registered in the hospital with only one name, was unconscious and had not responded to treatment in the past eight hours. Doctors attending to him estimated his age at just over 20. No one knew his full name or exact age.

Critically ill Rohit is amongst the tens of thousands of migrant workers who come to New Delhi to earn a

living, and are the worst hit in an unprecedented heat wave sweeping across northern India.

Since mid-May, temperatures in the concrete-heavy national capital region have breached historical highs. As per an analysis by Carbon Brief, a UK publication on climate change, after a brief four-day respite, from May 12 onwards, the city witnessed 16 days when the temperature breached the 45 degree Celsius mark.

Nights have been warm, with even the minimum temperatures hovering around 40 degree Celsius on six consecutive nights. There is no respite in even the pre-dawn hours. The cumulative effect of this severe and relentless heat has taken a toll on the city's migrant workers, said doctors at Safdarjung hospital.

He was brought with "loss of consciousness" on June 20. He was

running a temperature of over 105 degree Fahrenheit (40.5 C).

Rohit worked the oven as a cook in a pizza delivery service, an attendant who was his room-mate informed the hospital staff. Working in the big city, miles away from his village, he shared a small room with others in similar jobs.

His roommates told the hospital staff that when they left the room for their night shift on Tuesday, Rohit had returned from his evening shift. He was exhausted and ran a high fever when they left. That night stretching to the morning of June 19 would be the warmest recorded in 60 years in Delhi, scientists said.

When they returned at 6 am after their night-shift, Rohit was unconscious, unresponsive, his head burning. By the time they brought him to the hospital, he had to be immediately "intubated", put on a ventilator to breathe.

Away from his family back in the village—his address column is blank in hospital records—Rohit lay all alone on Bed Number 4 on Thursday morning, dressed in a pair of shorts and a

vest, with tubes running down his dark, thin face. His heartbeat was racing at 170 per minute, his blood pressure 'beyond safe limits', said treating doctors. His chances of recovery were poor, said the junior resident doctor treating him.

On the upper floors of the same building in "ER Ward 13", Sunil Kumar Singh, a migrant worker in his 50s from Etawah in Uttar Pradesh, who works in a metal factory, has been on life-support for heatstroke since June 17.

He worked 25 km away in NOIDA industrial area in neighbour-ing Uttar Pradesh without a written contract or any social security benefits in a factory that makes metal ware.

When Singh was brought to the Safdarjung hospital, he had a fever of 106 F(41.1C), seven degrees above what is normal for a human and much higher than 104F(40C), the standard used at the hospital for diagnosing a heatstroke.

His older son Aman Singh, who waited by his side, said that Singh worked as a "helper" in the same factory since 2022 and had fainted on the shop-floor on Monday evening, when his shift was about to get over. Several factories in the industrial area have no air conditioning, employees like Singh work under fans, routinely standing for up to nine hours every day. Aman, who left his temporary

job last year, added that his father was working to support the family.

"His co-workers arranged a vehicle to drop him to this hospital and called me here on the phone," Aman said. "He remained unconscious and has been on oxygen support for two days. Then yesterday, when he became conscious for some time, he started vomiting."

On a small table, he pointed to a fruit milkshake he had got for his father, which the doctors told him Singh was in no position to eat yet. "I am waiting for him to eat something soon."

The resident doctors attending to the patients on heat-stroke and heat-related illnesses on three floors of the new emergency block building said a majority of cases of severe heat-linked illnesses they had treated the past week included "car drivers, auto rickshaw drivers, security guards, wall painters, rag-pickers, and cooks," all of whom either work outdoors, or are directly exposed to intense heat.

He remained unconscious and has been on oxygen support for two days. Then yesterday, when he became conscious for some time, he started vomiting.

Between May 23 and June 18—a period of 26 days—Safdarjung hospital received 27 patients suffering from heat-related illness, hospital data shows. Four of them died.

But after June 19, the warmest night recorded since 1964, the number of patients reaching the hospital with heat exhaustion and heatstroke increased to 33 in 48 hours. Rohit was one of them.

The hospital recorded a total of 13 deaths between June 19 and 20, a hospital spokesperson said.

The patients were both young and old, he said. "Their families were shocked. They said they could not understand what had happened."

"In the 48 hours between June 18 and June 20, we witnessed nearly ten

times the mortality that we had recorded earlier in the month," said Dr S K Gupta, a senior doctor in the medicine department.

Patients are categorised as suffering from a heat-stroke, the most severe of heat-related disorders, if they show "an altered mental state, such as confusion and an impaired consciousness, and whether their body temperature has crossed 104 F(40C)", Dr Gupta said.

"We are seeing a lot of patients with heat-related illness presenting with gastrointestinal disorders, extremely high fevers, even seizures, and organ failure. Some with altered mental state undergo seizures," Dr Gupta said.

India lacks a system of recording heat-related mortality comprehensively and doctors acknowledge that the numbers may be higher than the official count. Dr Gupta said in cases where other co-morbidities or conditions are present, they record that as the cause of death. "If we find other medical history, such as epilepsy or say a previous liver disease, then we are writing that down as the cause even if heat exacerbated their illness and precipitated death," Dr Gupta said.

Safdarjung Hospital, set up in the 1940s, is one of the largest government hospitals in Delhi with over 1,500 beds.

The hospital which had so far reserved 13 beds in the emergency room, medicine and emergency medicine wards for heat-related cases, has now set up a dedicated "heat ward" to treat patients, said Poonam Dhanda, the hospital's medical social welfare officer. She said that in the 24 hours preceding June 20, there was a "sudden spike" in deaths. Two patients had reached the emergency ward with 107-108F and succumbed within an hour, she said.

This week, after several hospitals recorded deaths from heat illnesses, India's union health minister JP

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Nadda said that “heat clinics” will be set up at all government hospitals.

Delhi health minister Saurabh Bhardwaj has also directed all state hospitals to add more beds for heat-related illnesses.

The Ram Manohar Lohia hospi-

tal, another central government hospital 10 km from Safdarjung hospital, was the first to set up a designated “heat clinic” in May. The clinic has recorded seven deaths due to heat illness and offered treatment to 40 patients since its opening. Dr Ajay

Shukla, the medical superintendent of the hospital, told journalists that a majority of those succumbing to heat-stroke are migrant workers. □□□

(Anumeha Yadav is a freelance journalist. Her reportage focuses on the rights and social security of lower income workers, primarily migrants to India's metropolises)

## INDIAN SECULARISM!

# The Message of Faizabad

*Nilofar Suhrawardy*

**I**F BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY (BJP) had not lost the parliamentary seat of Faizabad in Uttar Pradesh (UP), where the Ram Mandir is situated, would the Indian elites, intellectuals, critics, and others have been talking about Indian secularism being still very much alive? After all, the population of Faizabad, less than a million, is not even a percentage of the total Indian population. So if the BJP had won this seat, but had performed as poorly as it has in other states, particularly UP, would speculations have been entertained regarding people being secular or not? Of course, Faizabad's identity rests on the grand temple situated there, where the once stood Babri Mosque which was demolished on December 6, 1992. The demolition led to riots across the country targeting Muslims. Yes, that was a phase, when Indian secularism faced a strong test. But if it had been demolished and crushed, India would not have remained home to the second largest population of Muslims in the world. That was not the first or last time that India witnessed communal riots. However, what cannot be ignored is that down the centuries, secularism of Indians at large has remained steadfast.

Now, it would be erroneous to assume that communal language with strong “religious” overtones of even the most powerful politicians would be easily believed and ac-

cepted as actually “religious” by even illiterate people at the grassroots. And why should they? Why? When most politicians give excessive importance to their religious exercises, their purpose is primarily viewed as political and/or electoral—if elections are around the corner.

Concerning Faizabad, there is no denying that excessive importance was given to the Ram temple thereby BJP stalwarts earlier this year hoping to sweep the national elections. But these leaders failed in not just the country, the key state-UP, but also in Faizabad. Their failure, as mentioned earlier, has compelled quite a few persons to acknowledge the strength of Indian secularism. Though the party won a majority in 2014 as well as in the 2019 parliamentary election, both times, BJP received less than 40 percent of seats. From this angle, it would certainly be erroneous to judge Indians' secularism in keeping with several seats won by the party viewed as “communal.” Elementarily speaking, given that India has a multi-party system, electoral results tend to be primarily decided by how well the opposition parties are united in seat-sharing and during their campaign against the key party. The voters' secularism is certainly not judged by this.

Specifically, in the case of Faizabad's result, it was assumed ahead of polls that BJP, or more specifically- Prime Minister Narendra

Modi's display of his religious cards at Ram temple this January, telecast nationally, would play a major role in helping the party return to power. In other words, Modi and his party colleagues played this card with the assumption that nothing else mattered for Indian voters in general against the religious cards used by them. Well, nothing needs to be said about what the results have indicated. What is stunning, is that the so-called “religious”- card, also described as “communal,” appears to have been viewed as the scale to judge secularism of Indians as a whole.

Briefly, even if one reflects on Babri Masjid's demolition, Gujarat carnage, and other communal incidents, neither can be viewed as keeping even fifty percent of the country's population engaged against each other or in violence targeting primarily minorities. Yes, the general trend of their being projected as such through various outlets of media, globally as well as nationally, has prevailed. Now, would it be fair to assume that the BJP genuinely represents the entire Hindu community of the country? Not. Some consideration should be given to its rival parties also including the majority of Hindus. Equally important is the numerical as well as socio-political stand of critics asserting their secularism and lashing out at communal cards used by extremist, right-winged groups. They include people from all religions, but the larger section is of Hindus. And these have not kept quiet when communalism has disturbed the country, whether in 1992,

2002, or at other times. They have certainly through these moves kept secularism alive.

Secularism has been and will be kept alive most strongly in all probability by those who dread being severely affected by the negative impact of communalism. Here, the reference is not to minorities targeted by right-winged, extremist agents. But it refers to all sections of society who feel severely affected by communal violence, particularly economically. When a curfew is imposed, the business of all shopkeepers and others witnesses a fall. Even when people of only a particular community are targeted to the point of being killed, it spells the loss of them as customers and also of those who choose to leave the area because of communal strikes. It may not be wrong to say that the negative impact of communalism, particularly socio-economically has contributed to a major decline in communal riots spread over large areas. Yes, this does not mean that communal perceptions and negative approaches between people of different communities have changed towards extremely positive interaction and so forth. Nevertheless, the prevalent nature of cooperation between them has certainly kept communalism in check. Cooperation includes employing services of those viewed to be efficient and available, irrespective of the religious community they belong to.

Against this backdrop, perhaps one also needs to understand that there is a difference in voicing communal views and casting votes in the context of perceiving economic

gains, threats and/or losses, and benefits they have experienced from power holders. Votes cast in Faizabad against the BJP, irrespective of the elaborate “religious” moves indulged in by power-holders may be viewed as a reflection of this approach. At the same time, if Congress and the Samajwadi Party, together with their India bloc had not campaigned aggressively against BJP, the result may have been different. In a way, their campaign voiced the socio-economic grievances/losses people of Faizabad have suffered primarily because of the BJP going over-board in display of its “religious”- card. Their prevailed the fear, that supporting, that is voting for them, would spell more trouble for people of this nature is socio-economic grievances for all, irrespective of their religious differences.

One may say, that 1992 marked a defining point of what nationwide communal disturbances can spell for Indians across the country. In 2002, it isn't surprising that Gujarat carnage was confined to the state even though the communal phase was telecast all over the country. Rather, it may not be wrong to say that the carnage played a role in pushing the then-BJP-led government out of power in the next elections. Indians weren't pleased with what they saw taking place in Gujarat. Modi was given a chance after two terms of Congress-led government, from 2004 to 2014. To a considerable degree, Indians themselves have been wary of being provoked to any stage of communal violence. The case is different if a few elements go over-board in deliberately creating disturbances between various communities in select parts. Or at times they have no choice when havoc is created because of some top orders' decisions. One may recall the order issued for the Covid lockdown in March 2020. People haven't yet re-

covered fully from its impact. But yes, it certainly may be viewed as another defining point when Indians became strongly aware of what socio-economic disturbances cutting across all communities can spell for them. An attempt was also made to add a communal colour to the Covid-phase. Covid-lockdown imposed in India has been described as the most extensive and harshest in the world. Confrontation with socio-economic problems also made people acutely conscious of what the national impact of a similar nature, particularly communalism can lead to. And this compelled the majority to once again draw a line- between what they preferred- communalism in the name of “religion” or secularism. This is not simply the case of culture, the majority has always been secular but also in this phase when certain elements seem to be going over-board to propagate communalism, the majority prefers refraining from it because of its negative socio-economic impact. The latter point has made them more conscious about its negative impact. Faizabad's case has certainly hit headlines and made more people finally acknowledge that Indian secularism cannot be easily defeated. But Faizabad is just a minor example. Communal frenzy in the name of religion now seems to have lost the power of blinding people-politically, socially, and economically-against the importance of Indian secularism and of course their votes! □□□

[Nilofar Suhrawardy is a senior journalist and writer with a specialization in communication studies and nuclear diplomacy. She has come out with several books. These include:-Modi's Victory, A Lesson for the Congress...? (2019); Arab Spring, Not Just a Mirage! (2019), Image and Substance, Modi's First Year in Office (2015) and Ayodhya Without the Communal Stamp, In the Name of Indian Secularism (2006). This article was originally published in [countercurrents.org](http://countercurrents.org) ]

**For Frontier Contact**

**PATIRAM BOOK STALL**

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## LETTERS

**Bonded Slavery**

India is one of the world's largest producers of silk. Silk sarees, silk curtains, and clothes command a premium globally. However, Sericulture in India has a dark side—bonded slavery, particularly child slavery. It is an aspect yet to be acknowledged, let alone addressed. The problem is severe and needs much attention. Most people employed in these industries are children of Dalits, people belonging to socially and economically marginalised communities.

MC

**'Hunting Arundhati Roy...'**

The FIRs against Arundhati Roy and Dr Hussain allege the commission of an offence under Section 13 of UAPA, which deals with punishment for unlawful activities. Section 13 of the UAPA comes under Chapter III of the UAPA, which states that the Court shall not take cognizance of the offence unless previous sanction is accorded either by the Central Government or by another officer authorised by the Central Government. More importantly, this sanction is accorded based on material collected by the investigating agency, which forms part of the final report under Section 173 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

It is unclear if the Delhi Police took the accusations made in 2010 to a reasonable conclusion. A careful examination of the speech given by Ms Roy shows that she had shown the lack of democracy existing in different parts of India, including Kashmir, Northeast and Central India, where the government military and semi-military forces are waging war against the citizens of India. In her talk, she urged people to be on the side of justice, justice for even the weakest sections of society. Thus, it was more of a call for establishing a true democracy where people need not live under threat.

The antecedents of the Central government in the last 10 years show that the real intent of these steps is to choke any voice of dissent.

Thus, the LG's invocation of the UAPA is politically motivated and should not be seen in isolation.

**Asish Gupta, Tapas Chakraborty & Kranthi Chaitanya, Coordinators, CDRO**

**Communal Flare Up in Odisha**

Communal violence flared up in Odisha a few days after the first-ever BJP government was sworn in Orissa with Mohan Charan Majhi as the chief minister. A curfew was imposed in Balasore town following communal violence during Eid celebrations. It is reported in the media: "The BJP has won the Balasore seat in both Assembly and Lok Sabha polls. Prior to the communal violence, two priests were brutally assaulted in Sundergarh district when they tried to thwart an attempt by robbers to loot a church. However, the robbers managed to decamp with Rs.10 lakh. The priests' room was ransacked." Reportedly, the communal violence erupted "when a section of Right-wing activists suspected that someone from the minority community had killed a cow inside a house and was trying to sell it in the market during Eid-al-Adha celebrations." (The Telegraph, June 19, 2024)

It may be noted in this connection that The Wire has reported the organic connection of the new chief minister of Odisha with the violent politics of Hindutva: "Newly-appointed chief minister of Odisha Mohan Charan Majhi has already landed in a controversy. Immediately after he was sworn in...news reports surfaced that he supported Sudarshan TV's editor Suresh Chavhanke to demand the release of Bajrang Dal activist Dara Singh, who was convicted for the 1999

murder of Christian missionary Graham Staines and his two children." (m.thewire.in)

It is feared that violent politics of Hindutva will be manifested in the modalities of governance in Odisha under the new political regime.

**Arup Kumar Sen, Kolkata Indefinite Fast by Medha Patkar!**

16th June, 2024: The 15th of June marked the beginning of an indefinite fast by Medha Patkar, for justice in the Narmada valley. The demands from this fast include, rehabilitation of all the remaining Project Affected as per the laws, policies, and Supreme Court orders. The women and men in the present struggle are also asserting their right to, a fair market value compensation to all those who endured losses in the 2023 man-made devastation along the Narmada, the appointment of Rehabilitation officers and Hon. Members of grievance Redressal Authority, Madhya Pradesh, in all the vacant posts, and till all these tasks are not completed, maintaining the Sardar Sarovar water level at 122 metres (crest level), keeping the 17 metres gates open.

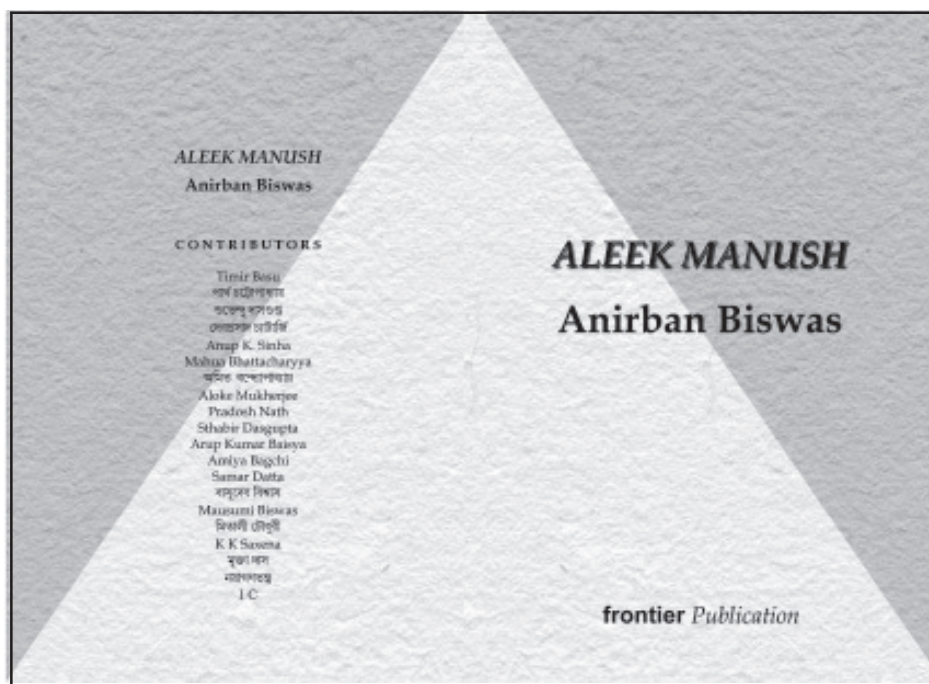
Women of the movement led the way with blue flags bearing the symbols of the river, banners that express their rights, chanting 'Narmada Bachao, Maanav Bachao' (Save the Narmada, Save Humans).

Today, 16th of June, is Day 2, and those sitting on relay fast are Saraswati bahen from Semalda, Bhagwan Septa from Narmada Nagar, Gauri Badole and Sita Avasya from Pichodi. Till the demands are met, the people continue with their Satyagraha in Chikhaldia's Kheda Muhalla, with Medha didi on an indefinite fast.

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