

frontier

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Horror and Horror

PEOPLE ARE SHOT ON SITE AS THEY EVEN TRY TO EVACU-ate injured people, medical personnel are targeted, hospitals are bombed. No food or water allowed. Israel simply rejected UN and humanitarian organisation access. In truth the United Nations Relief and Works Agency [UNRWA] which has provided education, health care, and other essential services to Palestinian refugees since 1949, could soon disappear. People are dying by injuries and by thirst. It would be more merciful to drop a nuclear bomb on them. In some places they simply rounded people up, forced the women and girls to the south and took men and boys. It is more like ethnic cleansing of 1948. In other cases they simply sent robot explosives to clear neighbourhoods or bombed people (men, women and children) from the air. The horror is beyond description.

"Our Job Is to Flatten Gaza. No One Will Stop Us. Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys." This is what the deputy commander of Israel's 749 Combat Engineering Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Adi Bekore, posted on his personal Facebook account on October 9, 2023, just two days after the Hamas attacks of October 7. It is a quote from a biblical passage in which the biblical nation of Israel is commanded to attack the Amalekites, an ancient biblical nation that was a recurrent enemy of the Israelites. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also invoked this reference early in the war—a moment cited by South Africa in its case to the ICJ as a piece of genocidal rhetoric .. At the time of writing, the 749 Battalion is operating in northern Gaza and Jabalia. Israel's campaign has intensified to the point of executions and depopulation. There, the battalion is seemingly racing to destroy as many buildings as possible. As one soldier put it, "We will leave them nothing!" Maya Radoszkowicz, a soldier in the 749 Battalion, filmed the explosion of Al-Azhar University, captioning it, "Goodbye to higher education in Gaza" with an emoji of hands in the form of a heart. They want to deny basic education and health-care to future generations of Palestinians. People in Gaza have forgotten to dream---they cannot think of normal life for decades to come.

The Gaza Health Ministry strongly condemned the Zionist entity's targeting of the Indonesian Hospital in Gaza and setting it on fire. Since the beginning of the Israeli criminal aggression on Gaza, there has been a

deliberate targeting of the healthcare system in the northern part of the strip. This includes its siege and direct bombing of medical, health, and emergency teams, culminating in the burning of the Indonesian Hospital.

As noose tightens, some in the north determined to stay. In Jabaliya, the situation has become increasingly dire. Several days of relentless

airstrikes and artillery bombardment have left the once vibrant town in ruins. Families are terrified, finding themselves trapped and unable to escape due to blocked routes. Israeli troops besieged several shelters housing displaced civilians before storming them. Videos circulated on social media showing dozens of detained men, and potentially also

boys, blindfolded and their hands bound. Some people have been displaced several times in a year.

People are sick, hungry and desperate. And yet, many refuse to leave. Palestinians learn lessons from history. They remember well how two-thirds of the Palestinian people were ethnically cleansed in 1948, never to be allowed to return. □□□ [Contributed]

COMMENT

*‘The Kaur’s of 1984’

THE YEAR 2024 MARKS THE 40TH anniversary of the 1984 anti-Sikh massacre—when at least 4,000 Sikhs were brutally killed in the national capital, in the aftermath of the assassination of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

For the past two months, *‘The Quint’*, the on-line magazine, has been rigorously working on a documentary on the same. But *‘The Quint’* people have gone beyond talking about the violence that unfurled in November 1984. Trilokpuri and Palam localities were severely affected by Anti-Sikh Riot. These places still bear marks of the massacre which took place 40 years ago.

Titled **‘The Kaur’s of 1984’*, this documentary focuses on the lives of the women survivors in the aftermath of the massacre. These women continue to fight back and strive for justice, forty years after the men in their families were killed in targeted attacks.

It is the story of women like *Darshan Kaur* who—shortly after losing 12 members of her family, including her husband—led the struggle of hundreds of other widows like her, helped them get jobs, and continued fighting the case against former Congress minister HKL Bhagat, despite several attempts on her life.

It is the story of 16-year-old *Nirpreet Kaur*, who saw her father being burnt alive by a mob led by MP Sajjan Kumar’s nephew Balwan Khokhar, with her own neighbours helping them.

As courts failed to deliver justice, *Nirpreet*, a mere college student, picked up arms and joined militants, only to be arrested days before carrying out the planned assassination of her father’s killers. She was acquitted later but not before spending almost 10 years in jail. She gave up guns and started a legal fight against the perpetrators. She found several

eyewitnesses and her struggle led to the conviction of Sajjan Kumar, 34 years after 1984.

This documentary is also the story of hundreds of widows and orphaned children in Delhi’s Tilak Vihar, like *Pappi Kaur*, *Bhagi Kaur*, and *Nirmal Kaur*, who are still dying a slow death everyday since the ghastly massacre of 1984.

The breadwinners in their families killed and their homes destroyed, they had to strive to even make ends meet. It’s been four decades, but they continue to suffer trauma and poverty as a direct consequence of what happened.

The documentary also records the experiences of those who have been closely working with them in their fight. *Advocate HS Phoolka*, who took up the violence cases pro-bono; *Paramjeet Singh*, the PUDR researcher closely working on the aftermath; and *Sanam Sutirath Wazir*, author of *‘The Kaur’s of 1984’*, the book that inspired this documentary.

□□□

NOTE

Assam Citizenship Crisis

A Correspondent writes:

ON AUGUST 28, 2024 THE Assam government had announced a long-awaited decision to unlock the biometrics of 9,35,682 individuals, allowing them

to finally receive their delayed Aadhaar cards after five years of uncertainty. The unlocking of biometrics for 9.35 lakh people during Assam’s NRC process has brought a

long-awaited relief to many. However, for countless others, the damage—financial, emotional, and social—has already been done. The five-year ordeal has disrupted lives, as individuals have been deprived of Aadhaar cards, a crucial document required for accessing government benefits, bank accounts, and conducting basic financial transactions.

The citizenship crisis in Assam is a stark reality that has left countless individuals in a state of uncertainty and despair. Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP) has engaged with those grappling with the fallout of the NRC process, revealing a deeply fragmented experience: while some individuals have finally gained access to their Aadhaar cards, many others remain in limbo, still awaiting resolution. This dissonance highlights the ongoing bureaucratic chaos and the emotional toll it takes on people, who are often caught between the hope of recognition and the fear of exclusion. The narratives shared by these individuals paint a vivid picture of the anguish that accompanies their struggle for identity and belonging in a landscape fraught with suspicion and legal ambiguity. As families grapple with their precarious status, the reality of this citizenship crisis underscores the urgent need for clarity, accountability, and compassion in addressing the rights and identities of all residents of Assam.

Fazrul Hoque from Dhubri speaks to the CJP Assam team about the human cost behind the state's administrative failures. Hoque is one of those whose Aadhaar has been released by the state government. "My company didn't transfer my salary because I didn't have an Aadhaar. For five years, I had to use someone else's account, and now I am fined for it. Getting my Aadhaar now is a relief, but these years of harassment—financial and mental—cannot be erased."

Others, like Tanmoy Saha, remain trapped in limbo. His biometrics may have been unlocked, but his Aadhaar is still "in process." For five long years, Tanmoy has faced numerous obstacles due to the delay. "It's just another bureaucratic hurdle," he shares with palpable disappointment.

Hasina Khatoon and Ariful Islam from Darrang district reflect similar frustrations. Both continue to wait for their Aadhaar cards, even after the unlocking of biometrics. "I've been stuck for five years because of the NRC biometrics issue," Ariful says, clearly exhausted. "Others in the same situation have already received their Aadhaar cards, but I am still waiting."

For many, it wasn't just about the prolonged wait. The bureaucratic hurdles added a level of trauma, as people were forced to navigate confusing processes with little clarity or help. Noreja Begum from Chirang district recalls the additional distress of losing her biometric enrolment document during the NRC process. This led to a further delay in her Aadhaar issuance. "I couldn't have done it without the help of CJP. They supported me through the process, and I finally have my Aadhaar, but it has been an extremely difficult journey."

Access to Aadhaar is more than just a document for many. It represents survival and dignity. Rina Ghosh, a mid-day meal worker earning a meagre Rs1000 a month, reveals how the locked Aadhaar barred her from

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basic government benefits. "I was eligible for Orunodoi, free rice, and MPAY housing. But because my Aadhaar was locked, I was denied these essential benefits." The impact of this deprivation has been particularly severe in rural Assam, where government welfare schemes form a critical safety net for many families.

For others, the damage extends to their political rights as well. Anowara Khatoon from Goalpara finds herself doubly marginalised. Her voter list status is marked 'D' (Doubtful voter), stripping her of her right to vote, and her Aadhaar, which was delayed by the NRC process, is finally here—but the name is incorrect. "I feel like I am invisible to the system," she says. □□□

HUMRA QURAIISHI'S COLUMN

Terrorising the Already Terrorised

Humra Quraishi

ONE NEWS REPORT AFTER another brings along details of the communally charged situation in Uttar Pradesh.

Bahraich and its Muslim population is in focus because of the blatant targeted attacks on Muslim homes and properties and the very threat to

their survival. Mind you, Bahraich is not that one lone place in Uttar Pradesh where Muslims feel severely threatened. That fear coupled with apprehensions of the targeted attacks by the Hindutva lot, accelerating in these recent years.

I'm a Muslim from Uttar Pradesh and as a child I spent considerable

time in Bahraich because my maternal grandfather was posted in Bahraich. And we would spend summer and winter breaks there. I remember the town. And now sit recalling all those I met there. Not sure whether they still around and their children and grandchildren left intact, as targeted violence against the Muslims has been so very blatant. Presumably, under the watchful eyes of the political rulers and the well-trained and well-equipped communal brigades unleashed all around.

Mind you, the Musalmaan of the day isn't wary of his mohalla or basti or village people. But definitely worried of the Right Wing politicians who are vomiting communal poison and together with that more than provoking the naïve to hate and attack the 'other'! There is a possibility of hundreds getting stuffed in the private senas that these political characters have raised, and then use them to unleash terror all around. Terrorising the already terrorised!

I wonder why the private senas are needed or required, when the police force is under their direct or indirect command. Also, who are the men recruited in those senas? Who trains them? And for what? Why no questions and queries come up on this very dangerous reality?

Have any of the Hindutva politicians been questioned on maintaining their private brigades or senas or outfits?

It is a serious and grim situation. The Muslim community sits worrying about the very future. The only cushioning factor is that the secular and liberal Hindu has started speaking out, pointing out that if these targeted attacks on the Muslims and their homes and properties are not halted now and immediately, civil strife could erupt and spread out. The *mantris* -*santris* will sit safe residing in those secure sarkari bungalows but the common man on the streets and lanes and by-lanes will get affected by the offshoots that violence invariably drags along.

And though one has nil expectations from the Right-Wing politicians who are following the communal Agenda with full force and focus, but yes, one does expect unbiased utterances from the senior or retired civil servants. They ought to stand by the honest and secular officers who want to protect the targeted and disadvantaged, but perhaps political orders come in way! Do not overlook the reality that the administrative machinery and the police force are under the direct or indirect control of the rulers.

Isn't it time that the concerned citizens of this country play a role to halt the blatant destruction of homes and with that of entire families? Once a home is bulldozed it's akin to demolishing an entire family or a clan. Gone not just their dwelling but their very vital base for day to day survival. With bulldozed homes gone are the children's school books and uniforms and clothes and the very kitchen... also hit the very wish to carry on, to take on challenges? Entire families and clans ruined!

Political rulers can be judged on the treatment meted to four significant groups or segments - women,

children, jailed population, and the minority communities. Today's rulers might claim this or that achievement in their shrilly synthetic speeches but cannot overlook the fact that the condition of women and children and the minorities is rather hopeless. Grim and worrying, if not alarming and shocking. Can't say much of the jailed population as those imprisoned sit all too subdued behind those high walls. But if the un-imprisoned population is going through traumatic situations then one can well imagine the condition of all those who are officially imprisoned.

FAIZ AHMED FAIZ's — BEIRUT

Came across this verse titled - **Beirut** - by Faiz Ahmed Faiz, in the volume titled - 'A Song For This Day - 52 poems of Faiz Ahmed Faiz' (Sang-E-Meel Publications). Translated from Urdu to English by Shoaib Hashmi, accompanying images from the works of Faiz's daughter Salima Hashmi, the verse stands out, along a diverse range, from prisons to prisoners to people and their plight.

This volume was published around December 2009, but holds out to this day. Today as Beirut and the other towns and cities of Lebanon are bombarded by the Israeli forces, there's much focus and concern for Lebanon and its people. Ending this week's column with Faiz Ahmed Faiz's this verse 'Beirut' tucked in this volume:

'Beirut'

Beirut the fairest maiden in the pageant of life,/

Beirut the wondrous replica of the Garden of Solomon/

The twinkling, dancing eyes of all the children/

Were shattered like so many bright mirrors/

And now all the shards are become like stars/

And their luster lights the sky of this city/

And the Cedar-land Lebanon is all light once more/

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Beirut the fairest maiden in the pageant
of life/

Beirut the wondrous replica of the
Garden of Solomon/

And all the faces covered in blood/
And taken on the crimson hue of it/
And their bright colour/
Brightens all the streets of the town/
And the Land of Lebanon too shines
bright/

Beirut the fairest maiden in the pageant
of life/

Beirut the wondrous replica of the
Garden of Solomon/

Each haunted home, each crumbling
house/
Seems the equal of the palace of the
Great Darius/
Each soldier the envy of Alexander/
Each maiden like Laila born again /

The city was there at the beginning of
time/

The city will be there till the end of
time/

Beirut the fairest maiden in the pageant
of life/
Beirut the wondrous replica of the
Garden of Solomon/

□□□

A PIONEER IN INDIAN HISTORICAL STUDIES

Suniti Kumar Ghosh: An Assessment of a Revolutionary Activist—IV

Amit Bhattacharya

DURING THE THIRTIES BOTH the Indian big bourgeoisie and the British capital felt the need for a joint front against foreign trespassers into this British colony as well as indigenous rivals. A process of greater integration between the two started taking place. According to Ghosh, during the inter-war period especially in the thirties, a new relationship developed between the British managing agencies and Indian big capital. The *banians* and brokers of British firms, whose industrial career had just begun or was about to begin—the Birlas, Goenkas, Bangurs, Jantias, Jalans, Bajorias etc.—increasingly invested in the companies controlled by British capital. They were allowed seats on the boards of the companies in which they invested, but without any share of control. Control remained firmly in the hands of the British managing agencies. “From the First World War onwards”, writes Tomlinson, “British-controlled firms, starved of capital from London, were forming alliances with Indian businessmen...” (B.R. Tomlinson, *The Political Economy of the Raj*, pp.53-54, cited in Ghosh, II, p.12). This process was going on in Calcutta, Bombay and other places. A fusion of European and

Indian big capital was taking place and large chunks of Indian big capital, subordinated to foreign capital, played the role of a junior partner (See: S.K.Ghosh, *The Indian big Bourgeoisie*, pp.210-11).

As Ghosh points, out, two significant processes were at work in the late twenties and in the thirties. First, the character of British investment in India began to change. Previously the typical foreign investment was small, made by individuals and directed by expatriates through managing agency firms. Previously, the typical foreign investment was small, made by individuals and directed by expatriates through managing agency firms. But these firms—Andrew Yule, Bird Heilgers, Jardine Skinner, Ralli Bros, British India Corporation and others—had served their *main* age-old purpose: that of mediating between metropolitan capital and the Indian market and sources of raw-materials. Though they controlled some manufacturing units like jute mills, cotton mills, engineering units, mining companies and tea plantations, they were *chiefly* exporters of jute, jute products, tea, raw cotton etc. and importers of manufactured goods like cotton textiles and yarn, paper, machinery and various other consumer goods.

A change had come over metropolitan capital itself during the inter-war period. Till World War I, Britain's staple industries were cotton textiles, coal, ship-building and iron and steel. Even before the War these British industries, except ship-building, were losing their competitive strength. The supremacy of Britain was challenged by the USA, Germany, France and Belgium. British industries like cotton textiles relied for their market mainly on the colonies.

British capital had lagged behind the new industrial powers in the formation of monopolies and cartels and the adoption of mass production methods. However, during the inter-war period there was increasing concentration and centralization of capital; this led to the development of monopoly capitalism in Britain. That period saw the rise of giant monopoly firms like Imperial Chemical Industries, Unilever, Guest Keen, Nettlefold and G.E.C. And while old industries declined, new industries like chemicals, automobiles, aircraft, rayon and silk prospered from about 1924.

Taking advantage of the protection afforded to industries in India, new giant corporations set up their branches and subsidiaries here. As Eric Hobsbawm puts it, “gradually the sun of the old-fashioned rentier was setting” and the sun of the giant transnational was rising (*Industry and Empire*, pp.214, 223, 259). The days of the old expatriate managing agencies were numbered. British and other foreign trans-na-

tionals like the ICI. Unilever, Philips, Union Carbide, Metal Box, Guest Keen Netttlefold, Dunlop, British Oxyzen, Glaxo and Swedish Match established their manufacturing units in India to dominate its industry.

Another event of far-reaching importance was taking place. As Britain was no longer the leading capitalist country of the world, the inter-war period marked the beginning of the transition from India's unilateral dependence on Britain to its multilateral dependence on several advanced capitalist countries led by the USA.

The establishment of branches by foreign transnational corporations—the 'India Ltd.s'—was viewed with suspicion by a section of the Indian business magnates during the late thirties. But what they were opposed to was, as S.K. Ghosh argues, not "the increasing influx into India of foreign-controlled industrial establishments", but the setting up of fully-owned subsidiaries of the powerful trans-nationals. Already in 1929, the Tatas had joined a Morgan subsidiary to set up a company to control its three hydro-electric companies. In the late 1930s, Walchand Hirachand was inviting US trans-nationals to build automobile and aircraft factories in India with him as a collaborator and the Birlas were exploring chances of collaboration with US and later, British automobile giants to set up an automobile plant in India.

GANDHI'S CONCEPT OF INDEPENDENT INDIA

As Gandhi said during the Round Table Conference in London, the King of England might continue as the king of 'independent' India; a British Agent' called 'a Viceroy or Governor-General' might remain, and the British troops might stay on to "protect India against foreign aggression, and even against internal insurrection" with the British Com-

mander-in-Chief becoming Gandhi's "technical adviser on military matters". And there would be 'safeguards' as "a guarantee for the safety of every British interest to which India pledges her honour" (CWG, XI, VIII, pp.147, 177, 246, 306, 309; also 256. Emphasis added. Cited in Ghosh, II, p.36.)

In Gandhi's future India, capitalism would be abolished but not capital; the capitalists would remain owners of their wealth but act as "trustees", and the princes and the landlords would retain their possessions. As he stated, the Congress was "trying to serve" the landlords, mill-owners and the princes, besides, of course the peasants. "There is a State People's Conference", he said, 'and it is held back under my iron rule. I have been holding them back... I have asked them to be satisfied with their present position".

According to Ghosh, Gandhi was "most anxious" that the princes should join the proposed Federation. In this respect his policy was complementary to that of the colonial rulers. They too wanted the princes, their puppets, whom they could manipulate according to their desires. The participation of the princes in the federation would be another important 'safeguard' ensuring protection of British rule.

It is obvious that the corollary to this policy was to help the raj to put down those who tried to rise against the imperial order and for the people and national freedom. In London, as Ghosh points out, Gandhi refused to put his signature on a mass petition—sent him by Fenner Brockway—protesting against the arrest and detention of the Meerut prisoners and demanding their release as well as the release of the Garwali prisoners who had refused to fire on an unarmed gathering of their fellow countrymen at Peshawar. He refused to do anything for Lester

Hutchinson, Meerut prisoner who, he knew, was then seriously ill, as he would "do nothing for the Meerut prisoners". He did not think it advisable to start then a campaign for the release of political prisoners in India. The day he reached London he condemned the young men who belonged to the "school of violence". He prided himself on the fact that "the Congress creed of non-violence" had "kept the forces of terrorism in check" and declared that Irwin had "opened up" a "course of cooperation" between him and the raj for fighting revolutionary violence on the part of the youth (CWG, XI, VIII, 3, 39, 45, 87 and fn.I, 289, 341, 376, in Ghosh, I, p.36-37).

THE SOLE SPOKESMAN OF INDIA

Gandhi repeatedly claimed at the RTC that he and the Congress represented all classes—from princes to landless peasants—and all communities—Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and so on (*Ibid*, 14-5, 117, 277, 357. See also XL V, 253, in Ghosh, p.37). He questioned the representative character of the delegates who claimed to speak on behalf of their respective minorities. Interestingly, as Ghosh points out, referring to Gandhi's claim to the sole right to represent the depressed classes and other minorities, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar remarked at a meeting of the Minorities Committee of the RTC: "to that claim I can only say that it is one of the main false claims which irresponsible people keep on making although the persons concerned with regard to these claims have been invariably denying them" (*Ibid*, 116, 160, 257; B.R. Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi Have done to the Untouchables*, p.65).

The Congress had recognized the representative character of other organizations, especially the Muslim League, in earlier years. In 1916, the Congress had entered into what

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is called the Lucknow Pact with the League and in the twenties, Congress leaders convened several All Parties Conferences and Conventions. However, as Ghosh asserts, with the growing alienation of the Congress from the Muslims from the early thirties and with the British raj drafting a new constitution for India, Gandhi staked the claim that the Congress represented the entire people of India and should be recognized as such in any future constitutional settlement. During his interview with the British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald on 30 September, 1931, Gandhi, claimed that “he could represent the Muslims and the Depressed classes better than those who purported to do so”, and urged the British Government to “*settle the whole question*” with him alone (See Ghosh, *ibid*, p.37). At the plenary session of the RTC on 1 December 1931, Gandhi, while insisting that Congress represented “the whole of India, all interests” and “all the minorities”, wished that he “could convince all the British public men, *the British Ministers, that the Congress is capable of delivering the goods*” (*Ibid*, p.357—emphasis added. Cited in Ghosh, p. 37-38). Ghosh remarks, “...these were no casual utterances but represented the deliberate policy of the Congress. This resolve to arrogate to themselves a monopoly of power as the sole heir to the British colonial rulers further widened the gulf between the Congress and the Muslim community” (Ghosh, *ibid*, p.38).

**‘CIVIL MARSHALL LAW’
AND PEOPLE’S STRUGGLES:
THE NWFP, BENGAL AND UP**

On entering prison Gandhi felt immense relief as it was for him an opportunity to escape from the turmoil of politics. It was an act of “God’s infinite mercy”, and when Patel and Mahadev Desai joined him, they became, as Gandhi said, “a

merry company”. Immediately after his arrest, Gandhi, in his appeals to the Viceroy and the Secretary of State, as Ghosh points out, assured him of cooperation and desire for ‘peace’. (Ghosh, *ibid*, p.48).

The people were not as fortunate as their leaders. They found themselves in the midst of a situation for which they had not been prepared. A bunch of ordinances poured out of the raj’s armoury to add to those which were already in force in the NWFP, Bengal and UP. The Congress and various other organizations including peasant associations and youth organizations were banned, large-scale arrests were made. Bans were imposed on political meetings and processions. Every preparation was made to subdue the people by sheer terror. It was an all-out offensive against the people. Samuel Hoare declared that “there would be no drawn battle this time”, and adding insult to injury, said: “though the dogs bark, the caravan passes on” (cited in Ghosh, Vol. 2 p.48).

During that phase people’s struggles broadly took two forms: ‘civil’ and what the Congress leaders would describe as ‘criminal’ and try utmost to prevent. Civil resisters hoisted the Congress flag, held meetings, brought out processions, raised slogans, picketed foreign cloth and liquor shops—all defying authorities and courted imprisonment. Closing of markets by traders, non-payment of revenue, rent and chowkidari tax, manufacture of salt were other features. There were also more militant forms of struggle and also peasant struggles not of the satyagrahic type. During 1932-33, there were as many as 120,000 arrests. Firing on unarmed crowds, physical torture and intimidation were used by the state on a wide scale. Prisoners in jails, even women prisoners, were subjected to inhuman torture.

The NWFP had been in revolt

since April 1930. Leaders like Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the ‘Frontier Gandhi’, were in prison. In their anti-imperialist struggle the Red Shirts and other Pathans showed scant respect for the ‘creed’ of non-violence. In the late 1920s, the Red shirts organization—affiliated with the Congress in 1931—came in close contact with the Youth League which was under Communist influence. The Youth League and the Red Shirts organized the peasantry and waged a guerrilla warfare in the rural areas.

The British responded with savage repressive measures. Troops, tanks and planes were used to suppress the revolt. Yet the people’s resistance grew more determined. The number of the Red Shirts increased from 750 to 25,000 within a short time after the arrest of their leaders. Thousands of Pathans from the tribal areas of the NWFP, which enjoyed some local ‘independence’—the Waziris, the Afridis, etc.—marched on Peshawar and attacked British posts. It is significant that 3 May 1930 was observed in Punjab as ‘Peshawar Day’ and that a Sikh detachment from Amritsar set out to help the Pathan rebels but were stopped by the British at Jhelum and 200 of its men were arrested. Again in 1931-2 the NWFP played a leading role in the no-tax campaign, which spread to wide areas in the province.

However, fierce repression could not suppress the revolt of the tribesmen. They were regularly bombed from the air by the British and other atrocities had been regularly committed by them. Ghosh refers to Gandhi’s letters to Agatha Harrison and Nehru—written in November 1933—warning them that the cases of atrocities should “be dealt with *privately*” and *should not be given publicity*. He did not “want any public propaganda”, he wrote (See: CWG, LVI, 179, 180: LVII, 77’ cited in Ghosh, p.50).

In Bengal, the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggles did not cease when Gandhi called off civil disobedience in March 1931, The Bengal Provincial Conference at Berhampur, Murshidabad, adopted resolutions in 1931 proposing to intensify the no-tax movement, to boycott Union Boards, British goods, British-owned banks, insurance and steamship companies and newspapers etc. (Ghosh, Vol.II *ibid*, p.50).

What was Gandhi's attitude to Subhas Chandra Bose? And where did Jawaharlal stand in this relationship, according to Ghosh? Let us quote from Suniti Kumar Ghosh: "Thanks mainly to Gandhi and G.D. Birla, Gandhi's man on the spot, the Bengal Congress was disorganized when the second phase of the civil disobedience movement opened. Subhas Bose's anti-imperialist, militant activities did not suit the tastes of Gandhi, "the born co-operator", as he often described himself. During his talks with Irwin in February-March 1931, Gandhi had confided to the Viceroy that "*Subhas is my opponent*".

That brings us to the role of Nehru. According to Ghosh: "Jawaharlal did not belong to the Gandhian core *in words* but followed Gandhi faithfully *in deeds* until 1946. Gandhi was never deceived by his words. His radicalism in words was of help to Gandhi: with his 'left' and 'socialist' rhetoric, as S. Gopal, his biographer and admirer, and many others have noted, he was "the best shield of the Congress against left-wing groups and organizations" (CWG, XLV, 200; XLII, 353, LXXV, 224; S.Gopal, *op.cit*, 137, cited in *ibid*, p.51).

ROLE OF BIDHAN ROY, NALINI SARKAR, OTHER BENGAL

CONGRESS LEADERS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH G D BIRLA

What about the Congress leaders of Bengal? There were, according to

Ghosh, groups of 'pure' Gandhians and from 1925, after Chittanrajan Das's death, Gandhi, tried to set up J.M. Sen Gupta as his deputy in Bengal, whom despite protests of other congress leaders of Bengal, he gave the 'triple crown'—presidentship of the BPCC, leadership of the Swaraj Party in the Bengal Council, and mayoralty of Calcutta. However, neither Sen Gupta, Bidhan Chandra Roy and Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, whom Gandhi cultivated, nor the 'pure' Gandhian groups had that popularity among the masses and ordinary Congressmen that Subhas enjoyed. That was a problem for both British imperialism and Gandhi. The British rulers put Subhas Bose behind bars frequently or forced him into an exile for a considerable period and ultimately never to return.

Some Congress leaders of Bengal, close to Gandhi like Bidhan Chandra Roy and Nalini Sarkar, and Calcutta-based big bourgeoisie like G.D. Birla, closest to Gandhi and his associates, did not like civil obedience to flourish. Bidhan Roy served as mayor of Calcutta during much of the period of civil obedience. What was Bidhan's role then? According to S.K. Ghosh, instead of leading or participating in the struggle, he hauled down the Congress flag from the Calcutta Corporations's buildings at the dictates of Calcutta's police commissioner. According to K.P. Thomas, "From 1925 onwards, Bidhan became an intimate friend of Gandhiji". On 30 January 1932 Gandhi wrote to him: "I love and accept your correction and say with you that we are near to each other" (K.P. Thomas, *Dr. B.C. Roy*, Calcutta, 1955, p.163; CWG, XLIX, 47; see also *ibid*, LIX, 267-69).

Bidhan was also very close to G.D. Birla. Birla, who became president of the All India Harijan Sevak Sangh in 1932, nominated him presi-

dent of its Bengal branch. Dyakov in his *India during and after the Second World War, 1939-49* (Moscow, 1952, p.220) observed that Bengal's Chief Minister B.C. Roy was hand in glove with the Central Government because he was a "stooge of the Marwaris" (cited by Ghosh, *ibid*, p.52).

What was the role of Nalini Sarkar during the civil disobedience struggle? It was "no less patriotic than Bidhan", S.K. Ghosh sarcastically remarks. As Nehru wrote, Nalini, who then belonged to "the dominant part of the Bengal Congress", which Gandhi had helped to install, "rejoiced to entertain Government officials, Home Members and the like, when most of us were in prison and C.D. was supposed to be flourishing... The Congress from top to bottom is a caucus and opportunism triumphs". In July 1934 Sarkar managed to get himself elected as mayor of Calcutta with the support of Government-nominated as well European councillors of the Calcutta Corporation, who were "magnates of Clive Street", the seat of British expatriate capital in India (Nehru to Gandhi, 13 August, 1934, *A Bunch of Old Letters*, 115; *Statesman*, 5 July 1934, cited in Ghosh II, p.52).

But he did not lose the friendship and trust of the top leaders of the Congress. He was Birla's candidate when he became a member of the Indian Central Banking Enquiry Committee 1929-31. Without Birla's support he could not be elected president of the FICCI in 1933-34.

It is interesting to point out that G.D. Birla, who called himself Gandhi's "pet-child" and whom Gandhi called one of the "mentors" whom "God has given me", was effusive in his expressions of loyalty to the British imperialists during the second phase of civil disobedience and worked hard to terminate it "once and for all".

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BIRLA'S ROLE IN THE FORMATION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA ACT

G.D. Birla played an important role in arranging the 'Poona Pact' and on the Harijan front, helped in terminating civil disobedience (as Nehru said) and in guiding the Congress along the constitutional path. Ghosh spells out the new tasks that lay ahead. The new constitution that would be imposed by the British raj had to be worked, ministerial offices under the constitution had to be assumed and the role of "partners in this repression and in the exploitation of our people" (to borrow Nehru's phrase) had to be played by the Congress in the coming days.

The Joint Parliamentary Committee's Report, which formed the basis of the Government of India Act of 1935, appeared towards the end of 1934. He wanted the British government to talk to Gandhi before the framing of the constitution. But all his appeals for a 'personal touch' were fruitless. Ghosh points out that early in 1935, helped by Anderson, Birla saw the Viceroy, Commerce Member Joseph Bhore and Home Member Henry Craik. Birla said to the Viceroy:

"There must be a proper understanding between the rulers and the ruled so that leaders like Gandhiji and his lieutenants may begin to teach people to treat the Government as their institution" (Cited in Ghosh, *ibid*, p.92).

Birla told Joseph Bhore that "If there was sincerity and goodwill, Mr. Gandhi may find a formula to work the constitution" (Birla to Gandhi's secretary, Mahadev Desai, 18 December, 1934, *Bapu a Unique Association*, p.456; II, 11, 9, 14, 17. *Emphasis added*). Birla told Henry Craik, the Home Member, that Gandhi endorsed Birla's view "that the proposed scheme could be worked successfully and to the advantage of

India, if there was sympathy and goodwill from both the sides". He stated to the Home Member:

"There is already a section growing up gradually which believes that even the best should not be achieved by constitutional means... Gandhiji is fighting against this mentality... It is essential that some settlement should be made in Gandhiji's life time which may bring the government and people closer to each other. This would be the beginning of the new kind of education which would teach people to believe that the Government is their own institution, which should be mended and not ended".

Birla warned that, otherwise, "A revolution of the bloody type may become an inevitable factor. And this would be the greatest calamity not only to India but also to England. Tories may say this would be India's funeral. I say it would be of both" (*Ibid*, 10-14. *emphasis added*).

Ghosh remarks: Birla was right. As the interests of the Birlas and those of imperial Britain were tied together, the ruin of one would spell the ruin of another" (*Ibid*, p.93).

Ghosh has summed up the situation in the following words:

"First, before the Government of India Act of 1935 was enacted in August of that year as well as after, Birla on behalf of Gandhi and the other Congress leaders repeatedly gave the raj the assurance that it would be worked by the Congress. Gandhi approved of the commitment that Birla made to the raj.

"Second, on behalf of Gandhi and the other Congress leaders, Birla assured the raj that they would abandon the path of mass action 'once and for all' and take to the road indicated by the raj—the peaceful. constitutional road

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to self-government and expect to be guided there by British imperialism.

“Third, Birla held that an understanding between the raj and Gandhi and the other Congress leaders was necessary so that the latter could teach people that ‘the government is their institution, which should be mended and not ended’. Such understanding would also create the proper atmosphere in which the constitution could be worked. In the absence of such an understanding a violent revolution might spell ‘the funeral’ of both Tory Britain and the Birlas’ India.

“Fourth, Birla, who held that imperial Britain and colonial India were bound together by destiny, urged that the raj and the right-wing of the Congress should combine to crush the left-wing” (Ghosh, II pp.95-96).

It is important to note that Birla’s views and commitments to the raj received Gandhi’s unqualified approval.

The constitution bristled with things like “reserved subjects”, “special responsibilities” and “safeguards”. The British-owned industry, trade, banking etc. were protected by the “safeguards” against any interference with their right to fleece the country as before.

As Ghosh points out, the Act was devised to build up a constitutional alliance between the imperialist masters, princes, big landlords and the compradors—all reactionary forces, foreign and native—to thwart the aspirations of the people.

When the Act was at the stage of preparation, an article in the *Communist International* observed: “In its scheme of a pseudo-federal colonial India British imperialism seeks to create such a system as would enable it to preserve and consolidate in the safest possible manner its rule over India, by utilizing to the utmost the feudal relics and all the different contradictions (of a national, religious character etc.)... The constitution which imperialism seeks to introduce is aimed not only at strengthening the British yoke but at consolidating all exploiting classes for the struggle against the Indian people, against the Indian revolution” (Valia, “The Economic Crisis and the Policy of British Imperialism in India”, *Communist International*, 15 May, 1932, in *Radical Periodicals*, 1932, p.285, cited in Ghosh, II, p.97.

Gandhi and his close associates and the Indian big compradors like Birla were optimistic. Even when the constitution was under consideration in the British Parliament, he “realized that the ‘Bill’ was capable of producing benefit, if worked in the right

spirit”. As Ghosh observed, indeed the Act which Gandhi later described as “the creation of the best British brains: and behind which “there were honorable motives” was capable of producing benefit for the classes Gandhi represented. To Birla, the Act “did contain seeds which were to germinate, blossom and bear fruit giving us ultimately the full independence that we aspired for”. According to Ghosh, Birla was right as he added: “we have embodied large portions of the Act, as finally passed, in the Constitution which we have framed ourselves which shows that in it was cast the pattern of our future plans. (Birla, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma*, p.131; Bapu III, p.268, cited by Ghosh, p.98).

Before leaving England, Birla wrote to Anderson” ...so I am returning now to India with the blessings of the new Viceroy, the Secretary of State and those others who count” (Birla, *Bapu*, II, 140—emphasis added, cited in *ibid*). On his return to India, Birla went to Wardha to Give Gandhi a first-hand report of his impressions as well as the messages from Hoare, Halifax and others. Mahadev Desai, Gandhi’s personal secretary, was sent to Bombay to bring Birla and Patel. Rajendra Prasad and Rajagopalachari had also arrived. □□□

[To be continued]

‘DAROGA SYSTEM’ PERSISTS

How to Temper Iron Souls

Ardhendu Banerjee

IN THE AFTERMATH OF A crime that has ripped the fabric of the society apart, a nation teeters on the edge of its own conscience. The barbaric rape and murder of a young lady doctor at Kolkata’s R G Kar Medical College and Hospital has become the spark that ignites an inferno of collective

indignation. From the hidden alleys to the open streets, voices rise, not merely for justice but for the reckoning that has long been overdue. This atrocity is not an anomaly but a glaring symptom of a deeper malaise—every hour, 51 women in India are brutalised, a statistic that should sear citizens’ collective soul.

The police, as the state’s appointed guardians of law and order, have long held a complex and contested role in society. In the wake of the tragic RG Kar incident, however, their position is under unprecedented scrutiny. From the outset, questions have swirled around their handling of the case, culminating in widespread calls for the resignation of Kolkata Police Commissioner Vineet Goyal. But it is not merely the failure to protect a woman at her workplace that has sparked outrage—

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it is the heavy-handed suppression of public grief and anger. The cancellation of a football derby and the sight of supporters from rival clubs marching together in protest have shaken the nation's conscience. A young woman's poignant plea—"We are unarmed; do not strike us down. I am neither Trinamool, BJP, nor CPM—see; I come before you in white, as nothing more than a human being."—has laid bare the raw vulnerability of the people. This echoes the words of SUCI Labour Minister Subodh Banerjee in 1967, who insisted that the police must never serve the interests of the powerful at the expense of the people. Yet, half a century later, the question remains: for whom do the police raise its baton? The answer, it seems, still lies with the rulers, not the masses.

The police present a duality—an instrument of the state and a collection of individuals, each shaped by the system they serve. This duality traces its roots back to the colonial era, when the East India Company introduced the 'Daroga System.' These police forces were not created to protect the people but to safeguard the interests of the colonial masters, ensuring their dominance and quelling any hint of rebellion. This historical legacy persists, casting a long shadow over modern policing in India. Today, the police remain a tool of power, wielded by the state to control and intimidate rather than protect. In Uttar Pradesh, the state government brazenly celebrates encounters as achievements, with the Chief Minister publicly boasting about the number of lives taken under his regime. Perhaps that's why eighteen years have passed since the Supreme Court ordered police reforms, yet no state has fully implemented them. In 1996, former IPS officer Prakash Singh sought to liberate the police from political sway through a landmark Supreme Court

petition. The court's seven-point guidelines promised a reformed police force, yet a 2021 survey by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative reveals a grim reality: only a handful of states have embraced these reforms. Most states persist in handpicking police chiefs, controlling transfers, and undermining the independence of oversight bodies. This enduring entanglement of politics and policing starkly contrasts with the court's vision, highlighting a persistent struggle for genuine reform. The quest for an apolitical, effective police force remains elusive. Thus, the police, it seems, prove again and again that they are a weapon of the state, used not for justice but for the perpetuation of power.

While the police are often viewed through the lens of institutional failures, it is crucial to recognise the profound human cost borne by individual officers. These men and women navigate the grim underbelly of society—handling domestic violence, substance abuse, and the aftermath of tragic accidents. Their lives are a relentless oscillation between high-stakes action and profound emotional desolation. In a world where cynicism becomes armour and dark humour a shield against unspeakable pain, they suffer silently. Their toll is stark: diminished life expectancy, chronic health issues, and suicide rates that far exceed those of other workers. The scars of their service—both seen and unseen—reflect a deep-seated trauma, especially acute for those involved in shootings, many of whom leave the force disillusioned within a few years. In this way, the average cop becomes a paradox of extremes—brave yet brutal, a seeker of truth yet a master of deceit. Driven by ideals yet tainted by greed, they embody a profound contradiction. As David J Dodd observed in

1967, they see themselves vilified by the very society they strive to protect, denigrated by the public, mocked by the media, despised by the impoverished, and hindered by the legal system. And in this searing contradiction lies the enigma of law enforcement's troubled soul. The facade of authority belies a fragile human reality, demanding society's empathy and a re-evaluation of the systems that shape their experiences. However, when the power of the state is mired in corruption and gangsterism, can one truly expect these police to safeguard women?

The protests sweeping West Bengal are a cry for justice, but the answer to women's protection lies deeper—in the radical reform of police force and the liberation of the state from its colonial mindset. True democracy must first take root, and the police must be granted the peace and security they need to protect others. Until then, the safety of women, and indeed of all citizens, remains an elusive dream, overshadowed by a system in desperate need of transformation.

In a world where state rulers prefer to awaken the primal instincts within the police, shaping them into instruments of power rather than protectors, is there a solution? The

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solution, though distant, is not unfathomable. A 1995 article in the *Bulletin Law Enforcement* painted a vision of ethical transformation through a three-tiered approach to police training. From the moment of recruitment, through the unfolding of their careers, to the ethical guid-

ance of their leaders, this model offers a pathway to redemption. But it is the often-forgotten middle tier that holds the key: the regular nurturing of empathy, the sowing of seeds that could blossom into understanding and humanity.

The rulers who seek to awaken

the beast within, fear the humanising of the police, for it threatens their throne of power. And so, genuine change remains a dream deferred, a vision of what could be, stifled by the very hands that should set it free.

□□□

R G KAR AGAIN

Maligning Junior Doctors

Pradosh Nath

THE COUNTER NARRATIVE of the West Bengal state government is basically aimed at maligning the junior doctors' agitation that motivated the civic society, otherwise apolitical, to take to streets, voicing their loud dissent against injustice and institutional corruption. The protest movement spearheaded by West Bengal Junior Doctors' Front (WBJDF) has virtually wrong-footed the administration, the ruling party, and shaken the perpetrators of the 'Threat Culture'. The party in power has now initiated remobilising the perpetrators as victims. This has been in tandem with the chief minister's stonewalling approach in the meeting with the WBJDF representatives. The CM has been in reality defending the indefensible by shielding the inefficient administration and the leaders of the 'Threat Culture'. The perpetrators were suspended, on the basis of the available evidence, by the concerned college authority. The action did not go well with the CM who got boosted by the High Court's interim stay order on the suspension. Now they have launched an association named Junior Doctors Association (JDA), comprising mainly the alleged leading figures of the Threat Culture to weaken the WBJDF's movement. In their inaugural press conference JDA raised counter allegations that they were being terrorised. It's now junior

doctors vs junior doctors! 'Threat Culture' vs 'Terror Culture' In 1983, the then CPM-led left front government too resorted to the same tactics by floating a rival organisation under banner 'Junior Doctors' Council' to break the junior doctors' historic movement.

The counter narrative is borrowed from the tenets of, much caricatured across the globe, the *skirmishes* between two neighbours, accusing each other of the same follies. The CM's wisdom suggesting actions against the perpetrators of the 'Threat Culture' should also be treated as 'threat', has been the foundation of the much needed counter narrative. The spokesperson of the ruling party, oblivious of the comicality in it, articulated the master's voice as 'Terror Culture'. It is like a convicted criminal claiming that his imprisonment amounts to denial of his freedom, and hence should also be considered as crime. This strategy has very intricate implications. The JDF and other protesting associations along with the common public were dumbstruck. It cannot go unnoticed that the political debates in Bengal have generally stooped down to the level of ugly fights between two neighbours.

It is to be remembered that the movement—Justice for R G Kar—is against the rampant corruption plaguing the public health infrastructure

and the health administration that is purportedly linked with the heinous murder of the lady junior doctor. The ruling dispensation has tried out ways to pass it on as just another crime that can happen anywhere in the country, and justice is well in progress through the arrest of a sex maniac who also is a Kolkata police pampered civic volunteer. This has been the initial effort along with the 14 August night hooliganism that is widely believed to be a pre-planned programme to destroy crime evidence.

Since then, the investigation has become complex and multi-dimensional—the murder and the motive behind destruction of crime evidence, rampant corruption in all aspects of medical college and hospital activities—ranging from recruitment, appointment and admission to supplies and procurement of medicine and medical instruments. And all these are executed through, what is now known as, 'threat culture', allegedly with direct and indirect blessings of the persons in authority. There are a few arrests, suspensions but end is elusive enough eroding confidence of the civil society. While state police administration is accused of being spineless, the CBI and ED do not have the right reputation of timely conclusion of investigations. After the R G Kar case was handed over to CBI and ED, the state government sighed relief that they would no more be accused of laxity in the investigation.

The uncertain and unknown deadline of investigation create space for concocting allegations against the

doctors. The striking doctors are being alleged as the real perpetrators of corrupt practices. In many cases the fatal deaths of otherwise non-critical patients in government hospitals are due to spurious medicine and medical instruments used during the treatment; while directing the wrath of the patient party towards the doctors.

Government propaganda is not taken seriously by common man. The ruling party itself has an interesting dual strategy. The CM had led a procession asking justice for R G Kar, while other leaders in intervals hurl abuses and threats to the striking doctors, and the doctors' fraternity in general. The ruling party's declared stand towards corruption and irregularities is 'Zero tolerance'.

When irregularities in the health administration is brought to the notice, the response has been—'nobody reported it to us'. When in the meeting with the CM the protesting doctors were asking for the resignation of the health secretary for being part of the corrupt practices, and shielding the corrupts, stern reply has been—the matter cannot be discussed here. The state government has engaged a battery of lawyers under the leadership of Mr Kapil Sibbal and incurring huge cost. It is not clear who the state govt. is defending or in other words who is it that Mr Kapil Sibbal fighting for/against? Till now Mr Sibbal's argument has been to defend the state police administration and against the

doctors seeking justice for R G Kar.

For one thing there is an administration that is not aware of any irregularities unless and until it is reported from outside. People, therefore, do not know what this administration is good for. What people also suspect that the whole health administration is party to corrupt practices, but what is unsuspected is that the ruling administration is not interested to address the issue. There is a need for deep cleansing of the government administration and its nexus with the political satraps at the ground levels. But people are unsure whether that will ever happen without a protest that has enough intensity to pull down the empire built on Himalayan corruption. □□

ART EXHIBITION

Rajendralal Mitra and his Photography

Atanu Basu

RAJENDRALAL MITRA CAN be truly called the Father of Photography in Bengal. In the year 1856, on January 2, the Bengal Photographic Society was founded. It is assumed that any serious pursuit of photography started from that day onwards.

Later on, this day was named as Bengal Photographic Day. Charu Guha Memorial Gallery at the second floor of the famous Coffee House at College Street, Kolkata, hosted a solo photographic exhibition of Late Rajendralal Mitra, the pioneer in photography in Bengal. Incidentally, the founder and the first President of the Photographic Society was none other than Late Rajendralal Mitra. Charu Guha was also a pioneer in the arena of photography in Bengal, in the last century. His son, late Shymal Guha later founded a gallery in memory of his father.

This photographic exhibition displayed printed copies, seven in num-

ber, photographed by late Mitra showing seven temples of Odisha. The photographs showed the Raja Rani temple (9th century AD), Pawaneshwar temple, Multeswar Temple, (both of them belong to 10th century AD), Lingaraj Temple, Bhasharewara Temple (both of them belong to 11th century AD), Bhaskaracharya Temple and Brahmeswara Temple (23th century AD).

Late Shri Mitra faithfully followed the traditional maxim as regards the angle and the detailing in capturing the brilliant art works of the temples.

This exhibition had other attractions as well. The exhibition also included the photograph of Vindu Sagar. It had showcased the equipments used by C Guha, like camera and associated items, such as Analogue camera, view camera etc. In the exhibition, photographer Mr Jayanta Sau was present to provide a commentary about the equipments and photographs as well.

The exhibition also presented to its viewers many rare photographs, photographic materials, album along with modern-day photographs. Mr Asis Lahiri prepared a hand-out for this occasion. It is interesting to note that when Rajendralal was the treasurer of this society, he was entangled with a dispute with the British. All the Bengali office bearers and members of the Photographic Society tendered their resignation en masse.

Those were the days when a solution was used to coat photographic films. Mitra had improved this process substantially by injecting new elements. Later, the prestigious Asiatic Society published a monograph on photography authored by Shri Rajendralal Mitra. Its title was 'Antiquities of Odisha'. A few photographs taken from this book were presented in this exhibition. □□

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DHYANBINDU

COLLEGE SQUARE

'BARBER'S TRADE UNION'

TU and Mulk Raj Anand

T Vijayendra

MULK RAJ ANAND (1905-2004) is considered to be a father figure in the history of Indian English writings. A lifelong socialist, he is known for depicting life of the poor in India in his novels. He became known for his protest novel *Untouchable* (1935), which was followed by other works on the Indian poor such as *Coolie* (1936) and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937). He is also noted for being among the first writers to incorporate Punjabi and Hindustani idioms into English.

Barber's Trade Union (1944) is a short story depicting two teenage boys—one an upper caste boy and the other the village barber's son.

Chandu, a barber boy, is the protagonist of the story. He is a close childhood friend of the story teller. Chandu being senior by about six months, to the narrator, takes lead in all matters. He is very alert, agile and active in the boyish pranks like catching wasps, squeezing the poison out of their tails and making them fly by tying their legs with a thread. He is also dexterous in preparing kites of various designs. Alas! In spite of these talents, he is a duffer in learning. Nevertheless, he reveals a laudable memory.

The narrator's mother does not like his mixing up with Chandu, because he belongs to a low caste. The narrator envies the freedom, enjoyed by Chandu, which fate had sanctioned to him by pulling a final curtain to the action of his father's role in the drama of life. He takes the hereditary profession of shaving and hair-cutting. After finishing his day's work, he goes to the town in the buggy of Lala Hukam Chand, riding on the footrest!

While coming back from the town he brings some gifts to the narrator. It is in the town that he develops an irresistible fascination for the English dress. One day he even asks the advice of the narrator as to the question of wearing one. The narrator's response is enthusiastically affirmative. So, he dresses up as a doctor in fine looking clothes 'and a pair of pumps and a leather bag in his hand'. It is in this dress that he goes to the Zamindar's house. The Zamindar is angry to see this low-caste barber wearing the dress of the doctor and defiling his house by entering. And therefore, he asks him to return in the formal dress of a barber. Then Chandu becomes the victim of the swearing tongue of the Sahukar Thanu Ram, a shopkeeper. He is scolded by Pandit Paramanand also very harshly. So, Chandu goes on strike! He stops going to the houses of the people as a barber.

Chandu starts going to the town and earning money by shaving people on the road side. Slowly his profession and prosperity make progress. One day he proposes an idea of buying 'a bicycle from the gambling son of Lala Hukam Chand' before the story-teller, who seconds the plan with all the cheerful feelings. He does purchase the one and learns to ride with the help of the narrator after a little difficulty. Then he makes the town a full-time field of work.

Meanwhile his strike has started showing results. Leaving the villager's heads and beards growing without fear of brush and blade, they become the laughing stocks of the village. One day he says to the storyteller to shout 'Beavers: Beavers: Beavers:' while the elderly people gather in the Sahukar's shop. On hearing it they

all become angry but other villagers burst into uncontrollable laughter! There was a rumour that the Zamindar's wife, who was many years younger to him, is planning to run away because she can't stand his unkempt looks!

Further one witnesses the attempt of the village elders threatening to punish Chandu for his offences by committing him to the police pen. They even think of getting the barber from Verka, a neighbouring village to attend them and are ready to pay even an 'anna' instead of 'two paise' which they actually paid to Chandu.

Chandu turns their plan upside down by the "gift of his gab". He succeeds in establishing Barber's Trade Union with consent and contribution of his cousin Dhunoo and consensus of the barbers within a range of seven miles from his village.

Lenin called trade unions as schools for communists. In the Indian context, as shown in this story, they are also schools for social transformation.

The story depicts caste oppression humorously. The author is able to do it because he is depicting the story standing from a position of victory against caste oppression! This comes through the formation of the trade union. The author beautifully depicts formation of class consciousness due to caste oppression. But unlike most fiction of this kind where the poor loses and the reader is left angry, here there is victory!

There is also an implied criticism of the trade union and Communist Movement in India. During 1928 - 29 there was a six-month strike in the Bombay textile industry. This was led by GKKU-Girni Kamgar Union. Ambedkar, the Dalit leader was asked to help and he readily agreed. However, he raised the issue of how Dalit workers were not al-

lowed to work in the weaving section because there you had to lick the broken thread with your tongue. The mill owners were not bothered with this issue. It was the upper caste Maratha workers who objected. Unfortunately, the Communist Party which was the leader of GKU did not bother and later under great pressure from Ambedkar reluctantly agreed. This mistake has proved very costly to the Communist movement in India and till today Dalit activists regard Communists as Manuvadi.

Even among Dalits caste is a problem because they are divided into sub-castes. Dalit theoretician Teltumbde says that today there are no subcastes left because all Dalits have become landless labourers and that they should unite as a class. But how and who will unite them? It is not enough that Dalit and Communist leaders share platform at JNU and other universities. I feel this story provides the answer—organising them in a trade union alone will help remove subcaste division and ultimately all caste divisions among the poor. Today MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi Na-

tional Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) provides a good opportunity to unionise all Dalit workers.

There are other values in the story which form a sort of critique of Indian writings on social realism and political movements including the communist movement.

Most writings and even films on Indian poverty, oppression and exploitation are grim and often end in tragedies. On the other hand, this story is full of humour and the hero is bubbling with energy and tricks!

The hero is forever curious about new things—market, dresses, bicycle and technology. Even within his trade he is interested in ‘The Hair Cutting Saloon’ and ready to abandon his old ways of sitting on the ground. ‘Appropriate technology’ wallahs may marvel at the ‘jugaad’ and the simplicity of the old ways. They don’t want to see the humiliation and the caste oppression of sitting on the roadside like beggars and earning one’s living!

The trade union is essentially a democratic institution. It negates social hierarchy like caste and gender. All members are equal!

Indian political movement inherited the Indian social reform movement of the Indian saints and sanyasis. Vegetarianism, anti-alcoholism and even celibacy has been celebrated and taken as role models. This has made it grim and undemocratic. It created an unfathomable distance between the leader and the masses. And since these ‘virtues’ are impractical, a lot of hypocrisy among the leaders has been part of the movement. Although the Communist movement and the trade union movements have been relatively free of this, they were not unaffected by it either.

TOP OF FORM

Mulk Raj Anand in 1944, has provided a comprehensive critique of Indian writings on social realism and political movements including the communist movement. To do it in an extremely readable short story is a great literary and theoretical achievement. This reminds one of Cervantes’ (1547-1616) famous master-piece *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, which did a similar job of providing a critique of Spanish medieval romantic literature. □□□

LETTER

Killing Journalists

70 journalists have been killed since the start of 2024. More than 60 are missing and 320 imprisoned, as of December 1, 2023 worldwide. To silence journalists and suppress uncomfortable truths, countless others are threatened, harassed, assaulted and spied on daily. In the face of increasingly organised enemies of the press, there is strength in unity. Why kill one journalist when there are dozens of others ready to continue their work by challenging the authoritarian regimes? Anything they want to hide will be amplified.

In a world where journalists are risking their lives in Gaza, Kyiv and Lebanon so that the world knows

what is happening—revealing much more than propaganda images from involved governments and actors—investigative reports on the targeting the media will continue.

In a world where journalists investigating environmental crimes are some of the most at risk and with Azerbaijan preparing to host COP29 ‘Forbidden Stories’ will continue to publish investigations by journalists from Abzas Media, imprisoned for more than a year in the Ilham Aliyev administration’s jail cells.

In a world where Donald Trump considers journalists “enemies of the people”, and Elon Musk has made X a global “fake news” factory committed journalists will continue their in-

vestigations on the deadly disinformation industry, pursuing the work of Gauri Lankesh, noted Indian journalist assassinated in 2017.

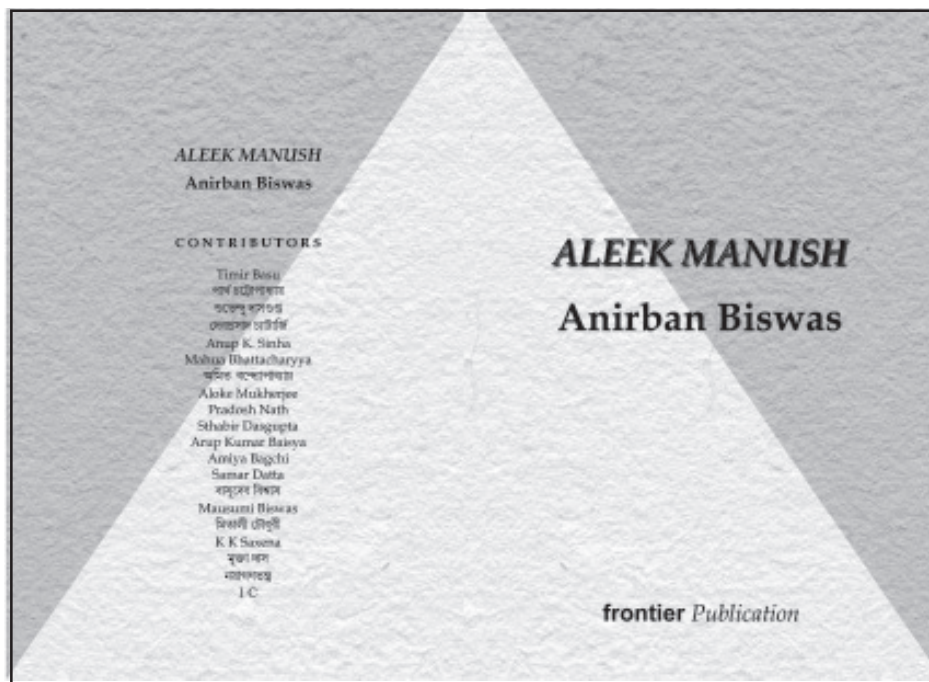
Each investigation and each piece of information that manages to reach millions of people is a victory against impunity. The press is a vital counterweight in democracies, and people need journalists to investigate and expose environmental crimes, corruption, surveillance, organised crime, corporate exploitation and human rights violations.

Today is not only a powerful reminder of the dangers that journalists face on the ground across the world. It is a call to action.

**Laurent Richard, Journalist and
‘Forbidden Stories’ Executive
Director**

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