

frontier

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Hate Campaign

INDIA IS AN ELECTED AUTOCRACY. ELECTION COMES, ELECTION goes. But nothing changes for the better. For the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) 'hate speech' is a standard norm in every election, not excluding even bypolls. This is a time-tested ploy for BJP to divert public attention from real issues and polarise the society on communal lines. The Opposition too indulges in similar unethical manoeuvring to influence voters. And Election Commission is a mute spectator. It is a paper organisation now and it does hardly apply its authority to stop malicious and slanderous statements though it can do it by implementing Clause (1) of Model Code of Conduct (MCC). In truth Modi's BJP government has virtually destroyed all independent and semi-independent institutions to mock at what they call the biggest constitutional democracy of the world. In all 173 campaign speeches by Modi after the election code of conduct [for the last parliamentary poll] took effect on March 16, he blatantly made false claims while demonising Muslims and other minority communities. The code forbids appealing to "communal feelings for securing votes". But this Election Commission under the Modi dispensation is a lame duck. In at least 110 speeches Modi made Islamophobic remarks apparently intended to undermine the political opposition, which he said only promoted Muslim rights, and to foster fear among the majority Hindu community through biased information and fake news dished out by the pro-Modi media. His propaganda sometimes sounded ludicrous as he would discover 'Muslim League's ideology in disguise' in Congress Party's manifesto. They also published animated videos vilifying Muslims and spreading disinformation during the campaign. On April 30, the BJP's official account on Instagram posted a video that reportedly received 1.6 million views before it was taken down. And it matters in vote market.

Modi repeatedly described Muslims as "infiltrators" and claimed Muslims had "more children" than other communities, raising the spectre that Hindus—about 80 percent of the population—will become a minority in their own land, not in the distant future.

In a speech on May 14 in Kodarma, Jharkhand, Modi said that "idols of our gods are being destroyed" and that "these infiltrators [Muslims] have threatened the security of our sisters and daughters". Modi apart several other BJP leaders, including Home Minister Amit Shah, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Assam Chief Minister Himanta

Biswa Sarma and former minister for information and broadcasting, Anurag Thakur, made speeches pitting Hindus against Muslims, fueling hatred and insecurity among the Hindus. In the just concluded Assembly polls in Jharkhand last month Union Home Minister Amit Shah accused the Hemant Soren-led government of shielding infiltrators and depriving tribals and backward classes of their rights. The infiltrators are allegedly coming from Bangladesh, only to 'take away local jobs and lands and marrying tribal girls.' As per their allegation, besides Bangladeshis, Rohingya refugees too are said to be settling in

West Bengal and Jharkhand with the tacit approval of opposition.

In a May 17 speech in Barabanki, Uttar Pradesh, Modi made false claims that political opposition would harm the newly opened Ram Temple, controversially built atop a razed historical mosque at Ayodhya. Then on May 7, in a speech in Dhar, Madhya Pradesh, Modi falsely said that the opposition Congress Party "intends to give priority to Muslims even in sports".

However, the Election Commission failed to take adequate action on time to respond to these violations. After too much criticism, both here and abroad as Human Rights

Watch has formally lodged a petition to the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights alleging Election Commission of India's inaction in addressing code violations, the Commission finally wrote to BJP president J P Nadda and Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge seeking their comments on complaints of violation of model code of conduct by star campaigners of the two parties during the campaigning for the recently held Assembly elections in Jharkhand and Maharashtra and by-elections in other states. But it is too late to talk sense!

□□□

COMMENT

A 'Reserve Army of Labour'

INVESTMENT IN INDIA HAS mostly gone to the more capital intensive organised sector. This has had the dual effect of starving the unorganised sector of investment and of inadequate job creation which forces most workers to work in the unorganised sector at low wages. A large part of the unorganised sector consists of people creating work for them since the system is not generating work for them and because of poverty they have to earn to survive. There is no unemployment allowance which can enable the poor to survive while out of work. They have to work to survive—do head load work, drive a rickshaw or sell *pakor*s. Further, a vast number of the marginalised do not find work appropriate to their education/training. So, PhDs apply for peon's job or those with high degrees applied for Railways non-technical jobs or M.BA.s appearing for test for a safai karamchari job which required them to clean drains. This results in frustration and disappointment in life for a vast majority. The problem

is particularly acute in agriculture which is receiving a declining share of public investment since the 1980s. Whatever investment is coming is for mechanisation—more tractors, harvester combines, etc. This is labour displacing. But, the surplus labour is stuck in agriculture since there is little work outside of it, resulting in disguised unemployment. 85% of the farmers cultivate less than 5 acres of land and have low incomes but have to support additional members of the family who do not find productive work.

In effect, neither the organised sector (employing 6% of the work force) nor agriculture (employing 45% of the work force) are generating additional work. Consequently, potential new entrants to the job market every year, numbering about 24 million, are forced to join the non-agriculture unorganised sector, which is a residual sector, where the wages are a fraction of the wages in the organised sector. There is a big differential in wages (for the same work) between the organised and

unorganised sector workers.

In truth the unorganised sector acts like a 'reserve army of labour'. The organised sector is also increasingly employing contract labour and not permanent workers. Labour is supplied by small companies which hire unorganised workers at very low wages. So, the organised sector workers know that if they lose their job, they will slip into the unorganised sector at a fraction of the salary they get. This fear reduces their bargaining power with the employers and they cannot ask for the wage increase they deserve. This keeps organised sector wages in check and is at the root of the growing inequality between capital and labour. The above also points to technology as an important determinant of unemployment and inequality in India. Technology is leading to mechanisation and automation. Now of course the danger is the increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI). Today, banking can be done via net or machines and requires fewer workers. Earlier in big infrastructure projects like, construction of roads one could see hundreds of people working but now big machines are used along with a few workers. In

brief, all sectors of the economy, whether, agriculture, industry or services, are displacing labour as they modernise. This resulted in jobless growth in 2000s and now to job loss growth. Thus investment in modern

sectors is not generating enough productive work. People are forced into self-employment and to do what they can. □□□

[Contributed by Arun Kumar, Dr Kumar is Retd Professor, JNU]

NOTE

Indo-Bangladesh Border Villagers

Kirity Roy writes:

MANABADHIKAR SURAKSHA Mancha (MASUM) has urged the Acting Chairperson of NHRC to address the problems faced by the residents of Indo-Bangladesh border village Sangarbari, who all are from Scheduled Caste community, under Khalishamari Gram Panchayat in Shitalkuchi Block, Cooch Behar, regarding restrictions imposed on agricultural activities by the Border Security Force (BSF) stationed at Sangarbari BOP 'Alfa Company', 157 Battalion of BSF. This matters is a clear picture of denial of access to livelihood which is a violation of their fundamental right to life under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees the right to live with dignity

Sangarbari is a small village with a total population of 1,040 people across 150 Hindu families, primarily dependent on agriculture, and the villagers have an annual income below Rs 36,000. These families possess approximately 1,380 bighas of agricultural land, much of which now lies inside the barbed wire fencing and is only accessible through gates 12, 13, and 14. Given the distances

between these gates and the IBBR pillars—250-350 metres for gate 12, 500 metres for gate 13, and 240 metres for gate 14; most of the agricultural land of these villagers is effectively trapped within the fencing.

Due to these circumstances, the farmers are facing several hardships:

- The farmers report frequent interference by BSF personnel, impeding their access to their own lands. Recently, on 7th October 2024, the BSF Commander of Sangarbari BOP, Mr Sandip, along with three other personnel, verbally announced that all bamboo trees within the fenced area must be cut down. Farmers were instructed to submit land documents to the BSF, failing which they would be denied access for agricultural practices. Following this, on 8th October 2024, the gates were closed, blocking essential access.
- The villagers report that Bangladeshi looters frequently intrude into their agricultural land within the fenced area, stealing livestock, crops, and

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other agricultural produce. Despite being stationed nearby, the BSF has not provided adequate security to protect the farmers from these incursions, rather they stayed in the IBBR, not in IBP.

- The bamboo trees within the fenced area are crucial for daily necessities and housing, yet the villagers are now being compelled to cut these trees against their will. Furthermore, farmers are questioning the necessity of submitting land documents to access their own legal properties, as they rightfully own these lands and should not face such a burden.

The villagers filed a complaint with the office of BDO, Shitalkuchi on 23rd August 2024, yet no resolution has been provided to date. This delay has resulted in continuous financial loss and stress among the villagers, who feel increasingly marginalised and denied their basic rights. □□□

[Kirity Roy is Secretary of MASUM]

The list of affected farmers is quite long, here are details of few

Name	Age	Dag	Khatian	Mouza
Uttam Basak	41	44	165	Mahishmari
Bishshwaswar Barman	58	3536	147	Mahishmari
Atul Basak	48	283/206	444	Mahishmari
Pradip Basak	45	113/125	159	Mahishmari
Pabitra Barman	53	196	36	Mahishmari

 HUMRA QURAIISHI'S COLUMN

Manipur's Relief Camps

Humra Quraishi

THE HAZE IN AND AROUND the capital city of India, New Delhi, is getting from bad to worse. Throttling lives, as the respiratory system is affected; choking and with that killing the vulnerable. Correct me if I'm wrong the polluting haze is so very severe that hundreds could be in the grip of death, dying rather too steadily! New Delhi is now the world's most polluted city.

Taking you still further ahead towards Imphal, with details of the ground realities put together by activist-academic and general secretary of the Socialist Party of India, Sandeep Pandey. He and his team travelled there earlier this week. And have put forth some basic realities. I quote from their report: "Recommendations after visit to 5 Relief Camps in Imphal on 11-12 November, 2024. There is discrepancy in cash and supplies which is given to inmates in relief camps. At Phayeng High School they have got Rs 1,000 five times since they came to the camp. At Manipur Trade and Export Centre they get Rs 80 per day per head twice a month. At Biramangol College Hostel people who have lost their homes to arson get Rs 80 per day per head and those whose houses remain undamaged get only Rs. 10 per day per head. At Samurou Government High School inmates get only rice from the government whereas at other camps they also get dal, potato, onion, oil, soap, detergent, shampoo, etc. Inmates here receive Rs 80 per head per day. They have also got Rs 1,000 five times during festivals. Inmates at Phayeng High School also get eggs twice or thrice during week and milk per day. How-

ever, at other camps milk and egg are not provided. At Pravabati College relief camp inmates get only Rs.15 per day per head for breakfast. At all camps except Manipur Trade and Export Centre there are common kitchens which are run by rotation by inmates. In common kitchens the fuel used is wood whereas inmates of Manipur Trade and Export Centre are able to use induction stoves."

Pandey and his team also focused on the fact that no compensation provided to be victims. "Nobody has been compensated for the loss of houses or businesses even though they have been promised many times in the past. Recently, the Chief Minister promised the camp inmates Rs 1,000 each before the Ningol Chakkouba festival but nobody got the money."

Focusing on the women and children in these camps: "Women at Pravabati College complained that a number of times government officials have come and promised them sewing machines and other items which they can use for income generation. However, no such thing has happened. Only once a training was provided for mushroom cultivation but there was no follow up in terms of providing people with resources to begin their activity. Three handlooms have been made available by the local community here which women at relief camp use for weaving. At Biramangol College Hostel in Sawombung four handlooms have been provided by the government. There is need for at least 15 more handlooms here. At Phayeng women make plastic bags and candles but they need marketing support. More

needs to be done in the direction of providing livelihood opportunities to women in relief camps. Women in Phayeng are much concerned about education of their children. They save money by selling some of the supplies provided by the government and hence go hungry sometimes or do not use soap so that they can pay the fees of their children. The children of inmates of relief camps should be admitted u/s 12(1)(c) of the RTE Act for free education in private schools or their education expenses should be compensated by the government. Else, like at Pravavati College relief camp where based on a certificate issued by the relief committee the nearby private schools impart education to children of inmates of relief camp for free, government should instruct the private schools to offer education for free to such children."

It's dismaying to know from this report that there's an obvious lack of medicines and warm clothing and blankets and also of the basic facilities in the form of Ration cards and also of the Ayushman cards. Above all, contact details of those who ought to be contacted: "We saw important contact numbers like that of Cluster Nodal Officer, CSO/Relief, Police, Revenue, Health/Medical, Education, Water supply, Electricity, Waste management, Food and essential items, District Control Room, Fire, Anganwadi, Counseling mentioned on wall only at Samurou Government HS relief camp. At Biramangol College Hostel relief camp numbers only of Violence against children (1098), Violence against women (181) and Electricity were given whereas there were no numbers mentioned for Relief related, Medical, Water-sanitation, Mental Health, Law and Order, Emergency (fire, etc.), Veterinary services."

Above all, the affected population is keen to get back to their villages and homes. When will that happen? When will normalcy return? To quote Pandey: "Whereas at other relief camps families get to stay together even though a number of them in one room, at Pravabati College it is a dormitory kind of arrangement where men and women stay separately. People are getting tired of staying in relief camps and now want to return to their villages/homes. Most sad case is that of

people in Phayeng High School relief camp whose village Kangchup Chingkhong is merely 1 km away. But when a 39 years old lady Leichongbam Ibemcha tried to go back to her village in November, 2023 she was shot at and died ten days later. Efforts should be made to bring back normalcy as soon as possible so that people can go back. People want to go back to engage in their traditional occupations of agriculture, sand mining."

This is the condition of hundreds

of our fellow citizens; yet we are being fed speech after speech that we are progressing. The political rulers of the day ought to be made answerable to the mess spreading around. Enough of those distractions along communal lines. Time to focus on the dark realities engulfing us on all possible fronts. Incidentally Prime Minister Narendra Modi never went to Manipur which has been burning for one and a half years.

□□□

A PIONEER IN INDIAN HISTORICAL STUDIES

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

Amit Bhattacharya

NOW GANDHI PREPARED to lead the Congress step by step to work the constitution, while keeping his plans secret from the Congress and people, and even from Nehru, as Ghosh observes. Gandhi remained silent when the Government of India Act of 1935 saw the light of the day. He sent a message to Nehru offering him presidentship of the next Congress session and trying to impose a vow of silence on him about the Act (Mahadev Desai to Nehru, 6 September 1935, J. N. Papers, Vol. No.17, cited in *ibid*).

Why Gandhi offered presidentship to Nehru, Ghosh asks. "It seems that Gandhi wanted to attach him to his bandwagon in order to work the provincial part of the constitution without meeting with any serious challenge from within and outside the Congress, for Nehru was 'the best shield of the Congress against left-wing groups and organizations' (Gopal, *op.cit*, 137, italics mine, *ibid*). In fact, Gandhi was sure, as he said at an AICC meeting in January 1942 that Nehru "says

whatever is uppermost in his mind, but he always does what I want". In fact, Nehru's rhetoric would lull the people into complacency and suit Gandhi's purpose, though Gandhi could not repose the same trust in Subhas (Ghosh, p.98).

The decision about whether to accept ministerial office under the new constitution was deferred by the Congress Working Committee and the AICC till the Lucknow Congress due to be held in April 1936. The Lucknow Congress under the presidency of Nehru rejected the new constitution "*in its entirety*" as it was "designed to facilitate and perpetuate the domination and exploitation of India and is imposed on the country to the accompaniment of widespread repression and the suppression of civil liberties" (*The Congress Encyclopaedia*, Vol.XI, 116-8, cited in *ibid*, p.99). However, as Ghosh points out, Nehru refused to support the socialist amendments committing the Congress to a policy of rejecting ministerial office. Though the Lucknow Congress rejected the new constitution "*in its entirety*", it

resolved to contest the next provincial elections under the new Act and left the question of accepting the ministerial office "to be decided at the proper time by the AICC..." (Gopal, *op.cit*, 205; *The Congress Encyclopaedia*, XI, 118, cited in *ibid*.)

Meanwhile—on 20 April, 1936, after the Lucknow Congress—Birla wrote to Thakurdas that he was "perfectly satisfied with what has taken place [at Lucknow]. *Mahatmaji kept his promise.... Jawaharlal's speech in a way was thrown into the waste paper basket... because all the resolutions that were passed were against the spirit of his speech... the things are moving in the right direction. The election which will take place will be controlled by 'Vallabhghai group' and if Lord Linlithgow handles the situation properly, there is every likelihood of the congressmen coming into office*" (PT Papers, File: 177, cited in Ghosh, p.99).

Nehru's verbal radicalism, however, did not cease. On 16 June 1937, he declared: "If the Congress decides to accept office under the new Act, I am sure that to that extent it will cooperate with and *strengthen British imperialism*" (Cited in Ghosh, p.99). In July 1936, the Congress Parliamentary Board Executive with Patel as President and Rajendra Prasad and G.B. Pant as Secretaries was appointed by the

Working Committee. The Executive “declared that its main purpose was to transform the Congress organization into an electoral organization and to revitalize and reorient it to this end” (Leader (Allahabad), 4 July and 9 July 1936, cited in B.R. Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj 1929-42*, p.60, cited in Ghosh, II, p.99). As desired by the British imperialists, the Congress and Gandhian organisations like the Gandhi Seva Sangh were converted into vote-getting machines to work the new Act (See D. G. Tendulkar, *op.cit.*, IV, 191).

As Ghosh states, Birla had an interview with the Viceroy in March 1937 after the elections were over. The Viceroy was happy at the Congress’s success in the elections and said: “*In fact, in substance the difference between Gandhiji’s position and my position does not at all exist*”. He asked Birla: “Would Gandhiji rise against Jawaharlal if the latter disagreed with him on any compromise?” To this Birla unhesitatingly replied: “*Jawaharlal would simply follow*”. Linlithgow agreed with Birla (Birla, *Bapu*, II, 327-30—emphasis added, in *ibid.*, p.100). “They knew the limits of Nehru’s verbal anti-imperialism and socialism”, Ghosh remarks (*ibid.*, p.100).

“Play Fair and We Will Play Fair”
The AICC at its meeting on 17 and 18 March 1937 acknowledged that people had voted for the Congress for its declared policy “to combat the new Act and end it” and instructed the elected Congress members of the legislatures to adhere to this policy. Rather surprisingly, the same resolution decided in favour of “acceptance of office in provinces where the Congress commands a

majority”, provided the leaders of the Assembly parties received assurances from the respective governors that they would not interfere when the ministers acted within the framework of the constitution (*The Congress Encyclopaedia*, XI, 253-4. Cited in Ghosh, *ibid.*, p.100). As Ghosh writes, wrecking the constitution came to mean in the Congress leaders’ parlance working it. Earlier, on 28 February, a similar resolution had been had been adopted by the Working Committee. Referring to that resolution, Gandhi said:

“The practical part of that resolution concerning acceptance of office has been drafted by me. Jawaharlal thought that it was not in conformity with the remaining three-fourths of the resolution and with the [election] manifesto... The language is open to two different interpretation: of this there is no doubt. But a *satyagrahi* can use language which may be interpreted in two different ways” (CWG, LXV, 118-19

Thus a *satyagrahi* like Gandhi was privileged to use language which was capable of contrary interpretations and was actually deceptive.

Rajagopalachari, the leader of the Congress party in the Madras Assembly, told Erskine, the then Madras Governor, that “*there was a real chance to get rid of a civil disobedience mentality for good*, and that it would be a thousand pities if the chance was missed” (Gopal, *op.cit.*, 219—emphasis added in *ibid.*, p.101).

Gandhi’s formula of conditional office acceptance as a day of protest was, as Suniti Ghosh observes, “a kind of political tactic, a sop to the anti-imperialist political workers and people who had believed in the Congress leaders’ strident rhetoric about wrecking the constitution” (Ghosh, *ibid.*, p.101). This face-saving device would “enable the would-be Congress ministers to satisfy their

own followers without demanding from Provincial Governors specific assurances which they were debarred by the Constitution from giving” (Home (Pol) File F4/16/37; cited in Misra, *op.cit.*, 326-7, in *ibid.*). The Working Committee’s resolution was described by the Congressmen of Bombay as “typical Gandhian move” (*Times of India*, 3 March, 1937).

The Working Committee met from 5 to 9 July and decided in favour of office acceptance “even though the assurances asked for had not been forthcoming, either in form or in substance” (*Ibid.*, p.101).

This interlude of conditional office acceptance, Ghosh states, was part of the Congress leaders’ double-deal and double-speak. On the one hand, there were secret contacts and secret talks with the raj and promises of compliances with the raj’s dictates, secretly communicated; on the other hand, there were brave resolutions and statements for the consumption of the people breathing firm determination to wreck the “charter of slavery”.

During this interlude, Birla, as usual, played his part. In June, encouraged by Gandhi, Birla went to England as the government’s non-official advisor in respect of Indo-British trade negotiations and met Secretary of State Zetland, Halifax, Lothian and others. On 25 June, Gandhi wrote to him that if Birla felt that his activity helped the “national cause”, “Congress is bound to set its seal of approval on it”.

Gandhi did not fail to compliment Birla for his contribution. On 18 July he wrote to Birla “What you have been doing is good... Good you will be. Good you remain” (Birla, *Bapu*, II, 373; III, 14-5—emphasis added, in *ibid.*, p.102).

In an article “Congress Ministers” in *Harijan* dated 17 July, Gandhi wrote that as a result of office acceptance, Englishmen and

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Indians would “now be thrown together as they never have been before... *If the Englishmen or Anglicized Indians can but see the Indian which is the Congress viewpoint, the battle is won by the Congress and complete independence will come to us without shedding a drop of blood...* In the prosecution by the Congress of its goal of complete independence, it [office acceptance] is a serious attempt on the one hand to avoid a bloody revolution and on the other to avoid mass civil disobedience on a scale hitherto not attempted” (CWG, LXV, 408—emphasis added. *Ibid*, p.103). In other words, the contact with Congress ministers would improve the British rulers’ understanding of “*the Congress viewpoint*” and persuade them to make a gift of “complete independence”, and no further struggle—non-violent or of the bloody type—would be necessary.

It was thus along the road of constitutional cooperation and under the aegis of British imperialism that the Gandhis decided to proceed towards their goal of ‘complete independence’. Ghosh observes that this was the road indicated by the raj to travel along. Senior British officials expected that “Congress would now become the controller of India’s political forces under their aegis”—a domesticated animal harnessed to the constitutional cart of which the British still held the reins” (D.A. Low, “Introduction: The Climatic Years 1917-47” in Low edited *Congress and the Raj: Facets of the Indian Struggle 1917-47*, p.30 in *ibid*).

The Congress leaders and the Birlas were anxious that they should attain the goal of self-government “without plunging into catastrophe”. Ghosh observes that there were indeed two roads before India, as pointed out by Irwin in 1929, by Viceroy-designate Linlithgow in 1935 and Secretary of State Zetland in

1937. One was the road of dependence on the British imperialist masters and close collaboration with them, which would lead to self-government within the imperialist framework; the other was the road of anti-imperialist revolution which would lead to freedom outside the imperialist orbit as well as to the elimination of feudalism and comprador capital—the main domestic props of colonial rule. The Congress leadership, which dreaded the revolutionary “catastrophe”, chose the former road. The decision “to avoid a bloody revolution”, even “mass civil disobedience”, was a consummation devoutly wished for by the British imperialists and the Indian big comprador bourgeoisie.

Early in 1937 G.D. Birla wrote to Winston Churchill: “Let me assure you that Mr.Gandhi and others of his way of thinking honestly wish to work the Constitution for the good of the people.”

Churchill, the arch-imperialist replied on 30 April: “The duty of the Indian electorate and Congress is to take up the great task which has been offered them, and show that they can make India a happier country, and at the same time do everything they can to win the confidence of Great Britain, and offer to her gratitude and loyalty...” (Birla, *In the shadow of the Mahatma*, 230-1—emphasis added. *Ibid*, pp.103-04).

On 22 July, Birla called on Churchill. On seeing him, Churchill said: “Well, a big experiment has begun” When Birla replied, “Yes. It has begun but it will require all your sympathy and good wishes”. Churchill “assured me of it but all the same said, “It depends entirely on you... if you can make this experiment a success, you will reach your goal automatically... *Play fair and we will play fair*” (Birla, *Bapu*, III, 21-2—emphasis added)

Suniti Kumar Ghosh remarks: “It

was indeed ‘a big experiment’. Whatever the rhetoric, the acceptance of office meant that struggle, real or sham, by the Congress against the raj was a thing of the past. There began a period when the Congress leaders would be tested. If they ‘played fair’ according to the rules of the imperialist game, the raj too would ‘play fair’. They would then be trusted with further doses of self-government—‘freedom would broaden down from precedent to precedent’—as Zetland, Lothian, Churchill and others were promising (Birla, *Bapu* II, 153; III, 6, 13, passim in *ibid*). The prospect was alluring to the comprador big bourgeoisie. Like a true comprador, Birla hoped that “both sides will make adjustments and perhaps it will be realized that there was a lot of good on both sides which was not appreciated so far”. He expected the Britishers to take “a far-sighted view” and “help us to realize our goal” (Bapu, *ibid*, 56).

“Gandhi had full faith in Birla. In his letter of 25 August 1937 he asked Birla to “do what is in the interest of India *irrespective of the opinion of the Congressmen*”. He added: “Rest assured that the Congress will have to accept what is for the country’s good” (CWG, LXVI, 71—emphasis added. in *ibid*)—as conceived by the Birlas” (Ghosh, p.104). □□□

[Concluded]

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ICONOCLAST-A REFLECTIVE BIOGRAPHY

De-Mythifying and De-Mystifying Ambedkar

Harsh Thakor

IN *ICONOCLAST*, DR ANAND Teltumbde, a distinguished authority on the Dalit movement, presents an illustrative biography of Dr B R Ambedkar. Without doubt, a path breaking work. The author brilliantly traces his crystallisation into one of the icons of the last century or dissects events that shaped Bhima Rao's evolution to Babasahaeb into making Dalits recognise Ambedkar as their leader. Teltumbde navigates areas beyond the boundaries of history, investigating Ambedkar's impact on contemporary India and penetratively explores the epic struggle for liberation. Teltumbde does justice to Ambedkar's legacy lighting a new dawn through the age, inspiring generations to accomplish the goals of eradicating inequality and cutting tumours of injustice from society.

Iconoclast projects Ambedkar as a man of flesh and blood, who manifested his own times and endeavoured to achieve his goals. In contrast to the hyperbole often associated with his legacy, Teltumbde eradicates any element of myth and eulogy to convey the essence of the man behind the legend.

"A biography often becomes a eulogy, an unquestioning celebration," Teltumbde remarked. "That wasn't the book I wanted to write, especially today when Ambedkar's legacy is being co-opted across the political spectrum. "But upon reflection"—he continued, explaining the prefix 'reflective' before the biography—"I agreed to look at him not as a god to be worshipped, but a case study. If we are to be inspired by him, we must see him as a real person."

In this work, Ambedkar is presented not as a deity of devotion

but as an important case study for the present generation to learn from. The author traced the methodology with which he evaluated the Buddha, whom he regarded as his master, to present Ambedkar's life and legacy with a critical analysis rather than mere eulogy.

Teltumbde recounted that there were several leaders who worked on different issues that ailed society but directed movements without considering the caste exploitation of the majority of their own people. This realisation gave birth to the non-Brahmin movement of Jyotiba Phule and later to Dalit movements in various provinces with varying visions and approaches.

The book unravels that after the 1930s, Ambedkar overshadowed other Dalit leaders and movements that struck across various regions, becoming the most impactful leader for Dalits, who constituted one-sixth of India's population. However, despite his stature, he was placed in oblivion by the ruling classes after his death. Dalits had to struggle tooth and nail to erect his statues, and it took a decade before a marker was established at his cremation site.

Ambedkar characterised castes as not only a social evil but also a religious evil, and spoke of dynamiting the Hindu Dharmashastras that sustained it. After realising the impossibility of this task, he concentrated on the political solution and came in confrontation with stalwarts like Mahatma Gandhi. Even in his intellectual navigation, he challenged giants like Bertrand Russell and John Maynard Keynes. This very rebellious attitude towards established icons and ideas that makes him an iconoclast.

The author narrates Ambedkar's sheer hatred for Communism. He is also critical of Ambedkar's silence against the RSS and Hindu Mahasabha and concludes that his goal was to annihilate caste.

Teltumbde recounted how Ambedkar's role as architect behind the Constitution was a myth which had to be dispelled. This was evident in Ambedkar's sentiments in the years after the Republic was formed. "Ambedkar said he was used as a hack to get the support of the Dalits for the book, and he would be the first one to burn the constitution."

While Ambedkar did indeed make the most significant contribution among the seven members of the Drafting Committee, it is important to understand that he was not solely responsible for writing the Constitution. T. T. Krishnamachari, a member of the Drafting Committee, acknowledged in November 1948 that the "burden of drafting this [revised] constitution" fell largely on Ambedkar because other members were unable to make "substantial contributions" due to "death, illness, and other preoccupations." Additionally, Ambedkar's role in piloting the draft constitution is evident from the Constituent Assembly debates, where he actively defended and explained its various provisions.

Ambedkar himself expressed anger with being labelled the "architect" of the Constitution. In a debate in the Rajya Sabha on September 2, 1953, he responded to a member's remark by saying, "I was a hack. What I was asked to do, I did much against my will... My friends tell me that I have made the Constitution. But I am quite prepared to say that I shall be the first person to burn it out. I do not want it. It does not suit anybody."

In detail the author unravels the

pro-caste policies of Mahatma Gandhi, citing Poona pact which deprived Dalits of political power. Ambedkar located the evils of caste system in Vedas, Shastras and Puranas. The book traces Ambedkar's antagonism with Hinduism in retrospect to the death of Ramabai and what drew him into Buddhism. There are important references to the temple entry Satyagrahas like the one at Mahad and struggles of untouchables in Nasik and Pune. In immaculate depth the author analyses how and why Ambedkar resorted to taking refuge in Buddhism.

The book unravels the historical processes crucial for the new generation who risk falling into the trap of a blinded devotion to Ambedkar, un-

able to diagnose their own condition, the factors responsible for their plight, or what hinders their movement.

Book doesn't adequately explain Ambedkar's negation of revolutionary class struggles or collusion with reformism, particularly on workers' front while projecting Ambedkar as a social revolutionary, rather than a social reformer. No criticism of how Ambedkar did not give cutting edge to class struggles or Communist influenced movements, or the glaring contradictions between Ambedkarism and Marxism.

In the concluding chapter Teltumbde concluded that Ambedkar's conflating with the struggle of an entire people is unparalleled in history. He also asserts that the icon was

plagued with his share of limitations.

The author reflects on how the movement Ambedkar built is in tatters, with leaders thriving on Ambedkar cult systematically patronised by the ruling classes. They have made the Marxists and Communists their prime target, instead of the Brahminic zealots. This has origins in the anti-communist slant of Ambedkar, who spoke against Marxism and Communism. In view of the author, Ambedkarism has been the root cause of splits within the Dalit movement, be it Dalit Panthers or RPI. The Congress by projecting Ambedkar as chief mentor the Constitution, made the Dalits embrace it as a holy text. □□□

[Harsh Thakor is a freelance journalist. Thanks reference from Hindustan Times]

SETTING ASIDE UP MADRASA ACT

The Madrasa Judgement

*I Mallikarjuna Sharma**

SOME OF THE LAST JUDGEMENTS reserved by and delivered before his retirement by Sri Y V Chandrachud, Chief Justice of India are very interesting, informative and of utmost importance to the progress and promotion of India's secular democratic polity. The judgement by a 3-Judge Bench decision delivered by the CJI in *Anjum Kadari & Another v Union of India & Ors* on 5 November 2024 substantially upholding and validating the constitutional and legal propriety of the U P Madrasa Act is historic.

Madrasa [officially written as 'Madarsa!'] is a school/college maintained and established by Islamic religious bodies, especially attached to Mosques, to dispense to the children—mainly or solely Muslim children—Islamic religious and also some modern education in Arabi-Farsi media. The establishment of Madrasas in India is dated way back to the Tuglaq rule (14th century AD)

in India and later adopted and regularised under the British Rule for Arabi-Farsi media education to Muslim students, which brought about an Education Code 1908 to recognise Madrasas in United Provinces (U P) for conducting Arabic-Pharsi examinations. After independence the Uttar Pradesh Government issued Madrasa Education Rules 1969 to regulate the Madrasa education in the State and then enacted the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madrasa Education Act 2004, which has been struck down as unconstitutional by the Allahabad High Court but that was reversed by this judgement of Justice Chandrachud.

Madrasas generally teach religious matters only and not any modern education regularly though after independence the above-mentioned Rules and Act made provisions for dispensing modern education also through the madrasas. Only quite recently (on 7 November 2024) the Uttarakhnad Waqf Board Chairman

Shadab Shams told PTI that they have decided to introduce NCERT syllabus and a dress code in its madrasas from next year as part of efforts to modernise madrasa education in the state. The board has also decided to open the doors of its madrasas for children of all religions, which is quite a welcome step.

In contrast, as regards the majority Hindu community in India there are Gurukul Schools (in Telangana) and Vedic Schools (set up by Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, etc. religious bodies) dispensing traditional Sanatana dharma oriented education but in Gurukul Pathshalas students have to cover the usual syllabus followed in all government schools and sit for the same SSC and Inter Board examinations but in addition they are given instruction about Vedas, Upanishads, etc. It is claimed that curriculum taught in Gurukul Pathshalas in Telangana includes: Vedas and Upanishads, Mathematics, Astronomy, Science, Languages, Medicinal theories, Yogic sciences, War science practicals, Martial arts, and Sports; and that they also emphasise extracurricular

activities, such as: Arts and crafts, Sports and physical education, and Community service. As regards Vedic Pathshalas established by Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham they also claim that they are dispensing modern education and also training in sports and games in addition to the Vedic studies, which are the main subjects therein, but it is not clear whether the admissions are open to all sections of people or to Hindus of certain sections only. They claim to be dispensing totally free education but there are also many conditions placed which deter the prospective students. For example, *Sampradaya Pathshalas* insist on the students continuing their education up to 12th class in the same school or else they will have to pay Rs 10,000 per year for the entire course if they want to leave in the middle and get a transfer certificate! It seems there is some amount fixed for education in UP Madrasas also but not known whether there are any similar restrictive conditions accompanying.

It was on appeal from the High Court judgement setting aside the UP Madarasas Act that this case came before the Apex Court. The Apex Court noted:

“On the merits, the High Court [on 22 March 2024] held that the Madarsa Act violates the principle of secularism and Articles 14, 21 and 21-A of the Constitution of India and is *ultra vires* Section 22 of the UGC Act. According to the High Court, the object and purpose of the Madarsa Act itself violated the principle of secularism, and thus, it is not possible to segregate or save any portion of the legislation. // ...The High Court held that the Madarsa Act in its entirety was unconstitutional and directed that the State Government take steps to accommodate all students studying in the

Madarasas in regular schools recognised under the Primary Education Board and the High School and Intermediate Education Board of the State of Uttar Pradesh. The State Government was directed to establish a sufficient number of additional seats and new schools, if required for this purpose and to ensure that no child between the ages of six and fourteen is left without admission in a duly recognised institution.”

Pursuant to the above High Court Division Bench judgment, the UP Government took prompt action by issuing a GO on 4 April 2024 directing that Madrasas which apply for and get recognition from education boards can run primary and secondary schools under the concerned education boards, but as for madrasas which do not get such recognition, they have to be closed with arrangements to be made for admitting the students studying there to schools run by the education department.

Special Leave Petitions to appeal were filed assailing the correctness of the above High Court decision on which the Apex Court heard all the concerned parties in detail and finally set aside the HC decision. The Court observed:

“Fundamental rights consist of both negative and positive postulates. They require the State to restrain its exercise of power and create conducive conditions for the exercise of rights. The essence of Article 30(1) is the recognition and preservation of different types of people, with diverse languages and different beliefs, while maintaining the basic principle of equality and secularism. In the spirit of positive secularism, Article 30 confers special rights on religious and linguistic minorities “because

of their numerical handicap and to instil in them a sense of security and confidence”. The *positive concept of secularism requires the State to take active steps to treat minority institutions on par with secular institutions while allowing them to retain their minority character. Positive secularism allows the State to treat some persons differently to treat all persons equally. The concept of positive secularism finds consonance in the principle of substantive equality.*” “The Madarsa Act secures the interests of the minority community in Uttar Pradesh because: (i) it regulates the standard of education imparted by the recognised Madarasas; and (ii) it conducts examinations and confers certificates to students, allowing them the opportunity to pursue higher education. The Madarsa Act is consistent with the positive obligation of the State to ensure that students studying in the recognised Madarasas attain a minimum level of competency which will allow them to effectively participate in society and earn a living. Therefore, the Madarsa Act furthers substantive equality for the minority community. // The High Court erred in holding that a statute is bound to be struck down if it is violative of the basic structure. Invalidation of a statute on the grounds of violation of secularism has to be traced to express provisions of the Constitution. Further, the fact that the State legislature has established a Board to recognise and regulate Madarsa education is not violative of Article 14. The Madarsa Act furthers substantive equality.”

The Supreme Court also stated:

“The High Court erred in holding that education provided under

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the 2004 Act is violative of Article 21A because (i) The Right to Education Act (RTE Act) which facilitates the fulfilment of the fundamental right under Article 21-A contains a specific provision by which it does not apply to minority educational institutions; (ii) The right of a religious minority to establish and administer Madarsas to impart both religious and secular education is protected by Article 30; and (iii) the Board and the state government have sufficient regulatory powers to prescribe and regulate standards of education for the Madarsas.”

And the Apex Court also ruled that the Madarsa Act is within the legislative competence of the State under Entry 25, List III of the Constitution. However, the Court also opined that the Madarsa Act contains a serious infirmity which can be struck down but the Act can be validated per the doctrine of severability.

“[The] only infirmity lies in those provisions which pertain to higher education, namely *Fazil* and *Kamil*. These provisions can be severed from the rest of the Madarsa Act. As noted earlier, the purpose behind the Madarsa Act was to remove the difficulties in running the Madarsas, improve their merit and provide adequate facilities to students studying in these institutions. The purpose was not limited to only regulating *Fazil* and *Kamil*, and the legislature would have still enacted the statute if it were aware that the portions pertaining to higher education were invalid. Further, *if the provisions relating to higher education are separated from the rest of the statute, the Act can continue to be enforced in a real and substantial manner.* On an examination of the Madarsa Act, it is

clear that prescribing the instructional material, conducting exams and conferring degrees for *Fazil* and *Kamil* were only a part of the functions of the Board. The severance of these functions from the Board does not impact its entire character. Thus, *only the provisions which pertain to Fazil and Kamil are unconstitutional, and the Madarsa Act otherwise remains valid.*”

As such the Hon’ble Supreme Court concluded that—“a) The Madarsa Act regulates the standard of education in Madarsas recognised by the Board for imparting Madarsa education; b) The Madarsa Act is consistent with the positive obligation of the State to ensure that students studying in recognised Madarsas attain a level of competency which will allow them to effectively participate in society and earn a living; c) Article 21-A and the RTE Act have to be read consistently with the right of religious and linguistic minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. The Board with the approval of the State government can enact regulations to ensure that religious minority institutions impart secular education of a requisite standard without destroying their minority character; d) The Madarsa Act is within the legislative competence of the State legislature and traceable to Entry 25 of List III. *However, the provisions of the Madarsa Act which seek to regulate higher-education degrees, such as Fazil and Kamil are unconstitutional as they are in conflict with the UGC Act, which has been enacted under Entry 66 of List I.*” and, accordingly, set aside the judgment of the High Court of Judicature at Allahabad dated 22 March 2024 and disposed of the appeals in the above terms. □□□

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VOICE OF LADAKH

“It’s Our Right: 6th Schedule”

**Thupston Tsewang
Akriti Kanodia**

GYALSON URBIS HAS been aspiring to be a Ladakh government officer for five years. Like thousands of other students in the union territory, this recent graduate maintains a rigid schedule of preparation for the civil service examination, sitting in front of his desk and pouring over books.

The irony is that there has been no notification for vacant administrative positions in Ladakh barring one for Staff Selection Commission posts. This has been a problem for the youth, who, ever since the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019 and the carving out of Ladakh as a union territory, are no longer eligible for government jobs in Jammu and Kashmir, which has a domicile requirement.

There has been a significant increase in the number of unemployed youth in Ladakh. When a notification for 797 non-gazetted posts was advertised in 2022, over 30,000 youths applied. Given the region has a population of around 3 lakh, the number of applicants demonstrates the level of unemployment, says Tundup Thinles, a former president of the All Ladakh Unemployed Youth Association. In the meanwhile, there has been an increase in the number of contractual employees, who do not enjoy all the privileges and rights of a regular government employee and whose jobs are not secure.

Ladakh has a literacy rate of 97%, but is one of the lowest ranking territories in terms of employment opportunities. Tourism provides much of the available jobs, even as it is seasonal.

Ladakh’s crisis is not born out of

the potential conflict with non-residents – as residents of Jammu fear – but with geographic isolation, lack of legal clarity, and the political unrest surrounding the demands of its population.

Dorjay, who operates a taxi service in Leh City, holds a degree in pharmacy but has yet to find work in the government hospital. Consequently, he opted to work in the tourism industry to meet ends. Dorjay aspires to obtain a Master’s degree in medicine in the hope of securing a coveted position in the region’s sole government hospital. Many persons like Dorjay have not been able to pursue the professions they have degrees in and have taken positions in tourism, hospitality and education. They face the daunting prospect of preparing for jobs that offer no financial stability or juggling their studies with part-time employment.

All of this can only negatively affect the mental health of the youth. According to the National Health Resource Centre’s 2021 report, alcohol consumption in Ladakh is significantly higher than the national average, with 23.6% of the male population and 3.8% of the female population consuming alcohol. Reliance on substances to cope with problems has led to an increase in mental health issues such as depression, tension, and stress amongst the youth.

The crises in Ladakh have most recently been brought to the fore by Sonam Wanchuk, a social activist, who along with 100 volunteers marched on foot from Leh to Delhi, to press the region’s demands, including on statehood, autonomy,

jobs, and representation. One day before Gandhi Jayanti, the marchers were detained outside Delhi’s borders and later confined to Ladakh Bhawan in Delhi. In protest, Wanchuk and his supporters sat on a hunger strike for 15 days, before the home ministry agreed to resume talks on the protesters’ demands.

The residents’ demands are primarily related to job opportunities and the protection of cultural identity.

Wangchuk’s protests have their roots in the situation in 2019, when Ladakh became a union territory without a legislature. Since then, Ladakh’s people and socio-political representatives have demanded inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, which would give Ladakh the power to create autonomous districts and regional councils with elected bodies. These councils would have power to make laws on forest management, agriculture, administration of villages and towns, marriage, land, and social customs.

In March 2024, Union Home Minister Amit Shah offered to extend protections similar to Article 371 of the Constitution to the region said it was unlikely to include the territory in the Sixth Schedule. Shah suggested that through the territory’s hill councils, the government would ensure the representation and participation of the locals and also provide 80% reservation in public employment. Wangchuk’s march to Delhi was to remind the union government of its promises.

Ladakh’s crisis is not born out of the potential conflict with non-residents – as residents of Jammu fear – but with geographic isolation, lack of legal clarity, and the political unrest surrounding the demands of its population. (Nityanand Rai, the union junior home minister, told Rajya Sabha in 2023 that there has been no land bought by outsiders in

Ladakh since 2019, when domicile requirements were scrapped.)

Permanent Residency Certificates will provide job security to the local residents of Ladakh, but only if there is rapid recruitment against vacancies.

The residents' demands are primarily related to job opportunities and the protection of cultural identity. Ladakh's education system is unable to provide opportunities for students. Many government schools have equipment for smart classes installed, but they are defunct, as teachers do not know how to handle the equipment. Tertiary

educational facilities are limited.

Since 2019, there has been a growing sense of distrust in the system, with demands for a Permanent Resident Certificate (PRC) and increased support for the territory to have its own Domicile Law. "There is an education gap that exists between Ladakh and other parts of the country, so if we are meant to compete and be on par with people who are coming from all corners of the country, then we must have adequate resources and help to grow and be compared to them," said Gyalson, the student preparing for government recruitment examinations.

Students like Gyalson continue to prepare for a promised future that hasn't come any closer to being fulfilled. Permanent Residency Certificates will provide job security to the local residents of Ladakh, but only if there is rapid recruitment against vacancies. The resolution of this legislative gap should be prioritised to ensure that the territory does not remain marginalised.

□□□

[Thupstan Tsewang is a member of the Ladakh Research Scholars Forum and has a Ph.D. from DIHAR-DRDO & Punjab University, Chandigarh. Akriti Kanodia is a fifth-year law student who worked in Ladakh as a teacher. Courtesy: The India Forum]

SHADOW OF FASCISM

In Search of Free Voice

Joydip Ghosal

THE FREE VOICE, ON Democracy, Culture and Nation' by Ravish Kumar (Publisher-Speaking Tiger) is not only an intrepid book but it is also a clarion call to everyone who wants to remain passive and neutral in this dark time. It chronicles the changing trajectory of the state since 2014. He was a Senior Executive Editor with NDTV. He resigned in 2022 on ethical grounds.

Chitra Ahan then said that it was a necessary read for everyone who felt despair at the state of affairs prevailing in the country today. Aishwarya Bhuta aptly described the book as mirror and siren. Without resorting to least exaggeration it reflected the complex social realities of a nuanced society. On the other hand it warned against the deification of a particular leader. This book was first published in 2018 when the foundation of new edifice of falsehood and lies was being laid in the world's largest democracy.

In the preface of 2024 edition Ravish Kumar wrote that a smart city

of politics had risen where the rule of silent majority had been established. Consent gave birth to that silence. That silence was not born out of fear. The wilful silence of majority acted as a wall. It created hindrance before those who wanted accountability and asked questions which were not pleasing to ears. According to Ravish Kumar society had stopped listening to them. It listened only to the powers-that-be.

The smart city of politics had been metamorphosed into smart city of lies. The visual order of democracy had been changed. It had become difficult to separate religion and politics. An all-pervading fear of psychological and physical violence had been executed to stem the culture of social harmony and healthy debate. Sandeep Sinha said that a journalist was not supposed to be a fence-sitter. He would have to take side. Hindi poet Ramdhari Singh Dinkar once wrote that evil doer and indifferent people were equal sinners. Ravish Kumar took side defying all odds.

Unequivocally Ravish Kumar wrote that media shed the burdensome responsibility of being the fourth pillar of democracy. The vast profession of journalism was crushed before the eyes. "It has been celebrating the passing of democracy even before the formal announcement of assassination." In truth communalism was being legitimised. It was masqueraded as patriotism. Apart from speaking about economic and social inequality one must identify the inequality of knowledge. It was so deep-rooted that a good debate wasn't going to resolve it. Misleading information designed to incite youths to prejudice and violence reached their smart phones as personal messages.

One needed knowledge in order to become citizens in the truest sense and ask uncomfortable questions to powers-that-be. When every effort to ask the questions was thwarted by canards or lies the regular practice of speaking out was gradually lost.

□ To delve deeper into the nuances of the contemporary politics Ravish Kumar cited the instance of 'Night of Broken Glass', between 9 and 10 November in Germany. That was the night when campaign to pin the Jews was put on

full swing. In the years leading to 1938 concerted attempt to drive Jewish traders and businessmen out of Germany was set up. Ravish Kumar showed how men were ordered to add 'Israel' to their names. Women were also ordered to add 'Sarah' so that they could be effortlessly recognised. The professors also played pivotal roles in spreading hatred. Jews were forbidden from entering Public Park. On the night of 7 November 1938 Ernst vom Rath was assassinated in Paris. He acted as third legation secretary of Germany. The assassin was Herschel Grynszpan. He was a Jew of Polish origin. For Hitler's murderous propaganda manager Joseph Goebbels it was a boon sent from heaven. The fire had long been smouldering. He needed wind to fan that. He got it within his reach.

Back to India on 9 June 201, Basit Malik, a reporter of *Caravan* magazine was attacked by a mob. He

was on assignment at Sonia Vihar in Delhi. His name indicated his Muslim identity. In February 2016 Alok Singh and Kaunain Sheriff, two journalists of *Indian Express* were attacked by lawyers in Patiala House Court when they were covering the sedition case against Kanhaiya Kumar. Asad Ashraf, Anupam Pandey, Vinay Pandey, the three journalists were arrested in Hanumangarh while investigating the arms training camps allegedly run by Bajrang Dal. When a twenty – four-year – old woman 'Riverbend' started chronicling and documenting the Iraq war and its devastation it was much appreciated. It was later published as a book 'Baghdad Burning: Girl Blog from Iraq.' Ravish Kumar without any hesitation stated that if a Kashmiri girl decided to write a blog on the lines of 'Baghdad Burning' India's mainstream media would brand her as anti-national.

According to him the national project for instilling fear had reached completion in the country. Indians

were not only fighting against throttling of democratic voices. In the near future they would not be able to step out in their own neighbourhood.

With much apprehension he wrote that the land around common people was rapidly turning into an island. But this was a great moment for those who had been declared as defeated and crushed. This was their moment that refused to bow down. They held their head high and spoke out in public and private spaces. They kept speaking hoping someone would listen to them.

In order to understand rising fascism this book is a must read. This book revolves around the truth that journalism is never complete without citizen and citizenship. If the information is not factual or true trust between citizens will diminish. And Ravish Kumar's concluding remark is more appealing: "...in order to be a citizen journalist today you have to struggle with the state and the citizen who is behaving as per state's desires." □□

LETTERS

ABVP Means Campus Violence

On the night of 28th October, ABVP disrupted the UGBM discussion on ICC/GSCASH in JNU and just hours prior was also involved in organising an event that erupted into intoxication, vandalism, harassment and animal cruelty in Ambedkar University Delhi's Kashmere Gate Campus. In both these campuses ABVP has had a long history of violence and standing as a wall against the cause of gender justice. Again and again events organised by ABVP in AUD have been hotbeds of gender violence and Hooliganism on campus, despite which they get a free hand and support from the administration.

Similarly in JNU as well, it has become a pattern for them to disrupt all democratic procedures by shouting, causing ruckus and raising casteist

and communal slogans. When criticised, the ABVP very conveniently takes up the cloak of religion to justify their actions. These incidents are not isolated but a product of the well organised nexus between the ABVP and the Administration where these hooligans are given a free hand to bring disorder, chaos and violence as they want on the campus. In JNU's UGBM people saw how members of ABVP made Casteist and Islamophobic remarks against students and JNUSU Office Bearers.

Just a few days ago, on the evening of 22nd October 2024 in an incident which echoes the same communal and violent attitude ABVP, its members including DUSU candidate Bhanu Pratap Singh, shouted religious slogans in Jamia Millia Islamia. The bursting of crackers was accompanied by unruly behaviour targeted at Muslim students, especially

women. The event was followed by several BJP IT Cell members trolling students with mainstream media's Islamophobic coverage of the incident putting the blame entirely on the Muslim students and questioning the existence of Jamia as a minority institution

All India Students' Association (AISA)

A Fascist Returns

It is not surprising that Donald J. Trump, an open white supremacist, anti-science lunatic, who ran an election campaign for President dripping with the hatred of women, vicious bloodlust against immigrants and threats of violence against those who disagree, has won the presidency of United States of America for a second time. Trump is an outright fascist and half of the United States voted for a fascist because his opponent Kamala Harris's entire campaign seemed to be about saving an exploit-

ative economic system with expansionist foreign policy that she described falsely as “democracy,” which isn’t working for large segments of both the political left and right; at the same time she and current US president Joe Biden were flouting an international system of laws in order to arm and finance a genocide in Gaza. The hypocrisies were too transparent to sustain. Joe Biden, Kamala Harris and basically the entire government and ruling class of the U S A, is supporting Israel in carrying out genocide against the Palestinian people. Israel is a rogue terrorist state, which claims for itself the right to defy international law, even to the point of committing genocide, as it is doing in Palestine and Lebanon right now. And the fact is that Israel could not so easily, and repeatedly, carry out massive crimes against humanity and war crimes, if it weren’t fully backed by the USA. Americans were told to choose between a lunatic racist, woman-hating, all-around fascist Donald Trump and a genocidal war criminal Kamala Harris.

Rudra Sen, Kolkata

Plight of Gottikoya Tribals

ST Panel urges Centre, States to take policy action for Left Wing Extremism (LWE)-displaced Gottikoya tribals. It is indeed shocking that the displacement should be attributed to LWE violence and no mention of Salwa Judum.

The situation in Chattisgarh is going back to being terrible. There are fake encounters and arrests. A recent report on the security camps that have come up every 3-5 km suggests how fear psychosis has gripped the entire region. Forests have been wantonly cut and there is no accountability. The government is using the displacement caused by Salwa Judum to deny people their basic land rights/patta rights, on the ground that no survey has been done.

The causes of the displacement are projected as ‘*violence between Maoist guerrillas and Indian security forces*’, ‘due to Left Wing Extremism. In truth majority of the Gottikoyas were dis-

placed from Chattisgarh between 2005 to 2011. Isn’t it a very great coincidence that the **Salwa Judum** was formed in 2005 until the Supreme Court banned it on July 5, 2011? Strangely enough the displacement coincides with the *life span* of Salwa Judum. The complete blackening out of the reference to Salwa Judum, a state sponsored armed terrorist group given a free hand by the state and its forces under the facade that this is a people initiated defence force which the Supreme Court rubbished, is deliberate. For one thing, **Salwa Judum**, in reality ‘continues to exist in the form of armed auxiliary forces, District Reserve Groups, and other vigilante groups.’ Is there a connect between this and the displaced not wanting to return to their place of origin?

Gottikoyas were allegedly encroaching on forest land, impacting forest resources and causing “irreparable damage”. How was this discovered? After all whether they had encroached on forest land in Telangana can *only* be determined when FRA implementation has been completed for the displaced with reference to their place of origin in Chattisgarh (who knows whether their community rights extend beyond Chattisgarh into Telangana, after all the states divided their homelands and shared them) and their present place?

Nandini Sundar

Delhi University, Delhi, India Siege, Starvation and Extermination

Israel’s crimes against the Palestinian people in Gaza are so terrible that the English language and international law seem to lack the vocabulary to encompass and convey the horror.

The World Food Programme mission that reached Beit Hanoun on November 10 “included two trucks carrying life-saving ready-to-eat rations and wheat flour, and one truck carrying bottled water” and was delivered to two shelters. But shortly thereafter, Israeli forces intensely shelled and surrounded the area where the aid was delivered and ordered families to leave. Next morning, Israeli forces attacked a

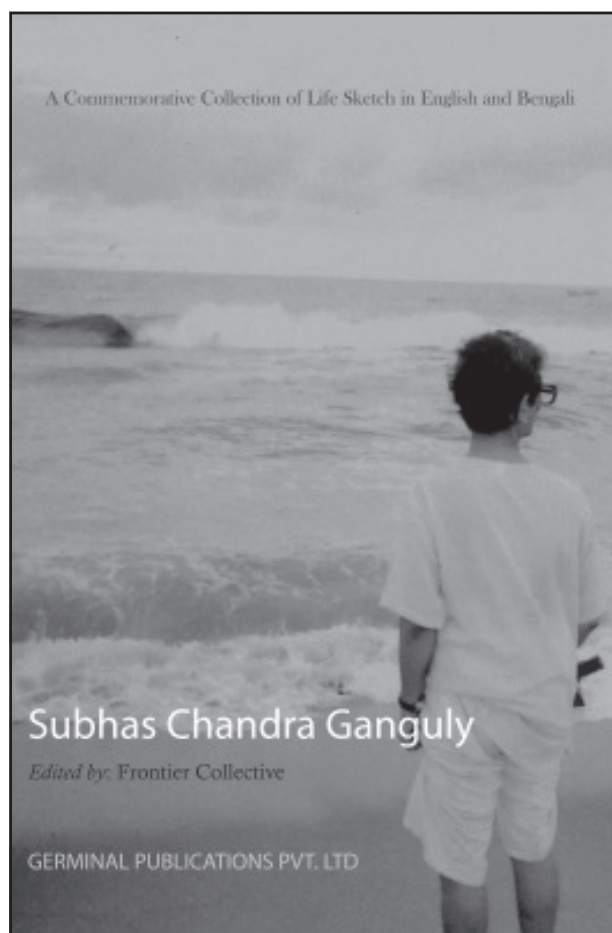
crowd of Palestinians awaiting the arrival of humanitarian aid at a roundabout northwest of Gaza City, killing and injuring dozens .. troops fired shells and bullets toward the group, who hadn’t received aid in around 50 days, forcing them to take cover in a nearby home. “As soon as they reached the building, the Israeli army bombed it. Screams from those still inside the targeted house were heard, but the victims’ cries for help could not be answered, as the area was inaccessible to ambulance and civil defense personnel.” Ramy Abdu, the head of Euro-Med Monitor, said that the world is witnessing “a comprehensive, systematic genocide. Every moving body in the northern Gaza areas, whether in the North Gaza governorate or Gaza City governorate, is being targeted and killed”. The Palestinian Center for Human Rights said that Muhammad Alloush, one of its field researchers, lost 24 members of his family in the Jabaliya attack, among them 14 children, the youngest only 5 months old. “These innocent civilians were killed while they were sleeping and suffering from starvation” .. “close to 70 percent of those killed in Gaza by strikes, shelling and other hostilities were children and women. The age group most represented in verified fatalities was children from 5 to 9 years old” .. “The entire Palestinian population in north Gaza is at imminent risk of dying from disease, famine and violence” .. Siege, starvation and extermination.

At least 72 Palestinians killed in Israeli air strikes on northern Gaza, November 17 2024. Since 5 October, Israel has launched a large-scale ground operation in northern Gaza to allegedly prevent Palestinian resistance group Hamas from regrouping. Palestinians, however, accuse Israel of seeking to occupy the area and forcibly displace its residents. Since then, no humanitarian aid, including food, medicine, and fuel, was allowed into the area, leaving most of the population there on the verge of imminent famine.

S Shankar

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