

# frontier

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## *When Human Rights are under Threat*

**T**HE ANNIVERSARY OF THE ADOPTION OF THE UNIVERSAL Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations, enshrining rights and freedom that belong to every human being, is a grand occasion as Human Rights bodies across the world observe Human Rights Day—December 10—with great enthusiasm. It is difficult for the people in a third world country like India with low political consciousness and poor organisational backing to stand up for their rights unless they know what those rights are, why they matter and how and when they are at risk. Very recently there was a lot of furore over the two-day discussion in Indian Parliament on the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution. But how Constitutional Rights are being trampled day in and day out by the ruling parties of all shades in almost every part of the country was hardly touched. While Prime Minister Modi attacked the main opposition Congress for changing the Constitution as they have made amendments 75 times in almost six decades, Congress, however, without defending its action, particularly promulgation of internal emergency in 1975, slammed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for making repeated attempts to replace the Constitution with 'Manusmriti' to execute their Hindutva agenda. But they talked less or virtually nothing regarding rampant violation of human rights across the country. Modi has a chequered history of destroying democratic institutions mandated by the Constitution ever since he took office in 2014. Also, his administration has earned enormous notoriety in suppressing even a mild voice of dissent mocking at human rights and ignoring the Constitution with impunity because of their brute majority in Parliament. For all practical purposes Modi's India is a big prison house, citizens' rights are looted and press freedom is curtailed to such an extent that the very survival of independent media is in question. Things were not better during the Congress rule though they are too vocal today to criticise the BJP for destroying India's constitutional spirit in every sphere.

Political parties irrespective of their colour don't have any programme of action to fight against violation of human rights. They just finish their duty by leaving the issue to some human rights groups and civil society to act.

In truth human rights are under threat throughout the world. Only independent media fights for the cause of the people, albeit this is the time when a free press matters more than ever. Over the last decade, the global state of human rights has gone from worrying to outright alarming. The

impact of climate change, driven by corporate greed and the refusal of those in power to invest directly in protecting the planet, has been devastating—resulting in massive loss of life due to unprecedented weather events, an increase in climate-related migration, and the exacerbation of existing harm to marginalised peoples. The rise of far-right governments and the policies they have enacted across the globe have threatened the rights of life, health, safety and cultural identities. Then the US military-in-

dustrial complex has directly contributed to the destruction of civilian lives and created immense humanitarian crises in the Middle East, Ukraine and across the Global South.

The climate crisis is no longer a distant danger—it is the current reality. Global temperatures have risen by 1.2 degree Celsius since pre-industrial times. Extreme weather conditions are increasing in frequency and intensity, sea-levels are rising at a fearful rate. There lies a huge gap between official posturing and genu-

ine action. The much publicised climate summits have simply failed to guarantee the protection of the rights of the people.

And now the Trump administration has set out a roadmap for destroying the rights not just in the US, but around the world. At the time of writing four students at the University of Rochester are said to be facing up to seven years in jail for putting up posters around campus accusing a small number of faculty members enabling the Genocide in Gaza. □□□

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## COMMENT

### Syria after Assad

THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN opposed to the Assad regime in Syria have cited its human rights violations to argue that no tears need to be shed over its sudden and dramatic ouster. However these critics of the outgoing regime must face the wider question whether there are any prospects of the outgoing regime being replaced by anything better from the perspective of human rights. The main rebel group with its previous violent and sectarian record provides hardly any hope of any change for the better.

Whatever its other failures, the Assad regime had a well-established record of providing pluralist governance under which various communities with diverse faiths and cultures—Shias, Sunnis, Christians, others—could co-exist without discrimination and without being tormented on the basis of faith or sect. This cannot be said of the main rebel group HTS, with its Al-Qaeda (AQ) origins, which may have toned down its war cries recently to gain wider acceptability but its record, speaks of being intolerant towards other faiths or sects, in particular for its hostility towards the Shias. The Christian minority in Syria, which includes descendants of some of the earliest Christians, is also most un-

likely to feel safe for long under any administration that may be dominated by the HTS.

Due to the centrality of the Palestine issue in this region and the immense sufferings of the Palestinians in recent times, questions arise regarding the impact of the recent changes in Syria on the Palestinians. Clearly the position of the Palestinians has weakened as the axis of resistance which has been providing support and solidarity to the Palestinian cause has been weakened.

Several reports have appeared regarding a relationship of cooperation and understanding between the Syrian rebel forces including the HTS and Israel. Already Israel is showcasing a strategy of dismantling Syria's military capabilities.

While a big majority of the Palestinians are Sunni Muslims, it is in fact the predominantly Shia axis of resistance which has been in the frontlines of providing the most active help to the Palestinians and its weakening is a setback for the Palestinian resistance too, at least in the short-term.

The UN documented arbitrary detentions, executions of opponents and other human rights violations in HTS controlled areas while a report by Human Rights Watch has brought

out the terrible human rights situation prevailing in the areas of the rebel groups controlled by Turkey.

While there is a lot of uncertainty regarding what kind of new government will emerge in Syria, there are no strong reasons to suggest that from a perspective of peace and justice it will be a better government compared to the ousted regime.

No doubt the end of any civil war is always good but the problem is that there is no indication just now that the Syrian civil war has ended.

Turkey's President Erdogan has already shown the extent of his hostility towards the Kurds and it remains to be seen how this hostility may clash with the USA in the context of the US-guided Kurd groups. The fall of the Syrian regime offers a poignant reflection on the fragility of alliances, the calculus of survival, and the price of inertia.

The prisoners who have been freed certainly have cause to celebrate. The Sunnis who constitute a big majority of population in Syria can celebrate for their own narrow reasons of a minority Shia leadership regime being ousted after several decades as it happened in Iraq earlier. But beyond this, from a wider perspective of justice and peace, there is no reason yet to see recent events as a victory for the forces of peace and justice. □□□

[Contributed by Bharat Dogra]

## NOTE

## Targeting APCR

*Prakash Singh writes:*

**T**HE DELHI POLICE ON November 29, 2024 carried out a politically motivated raid on the offices of the Association for Protection of Civil Rights (APCR). The action appeared to be part of the government's crackdown against groups that criticise speech that could provoke violence against Muslims and other minorities.

The police claimed to be acting on a complaint over an exhibition by the group that documents human rights abuses and incitement to violence against Muslims since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in 2014. The police also attempted to detain Nadeem Khan, the group's national general secretary.

"It's perhaps unsurprising that Delhi police raided the offices of a group highlighting the BJP-led government's appalling record of targeting Muslims and other minorities over the last decade," said Elaine Pearson, Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "Instead of revoking harmful policies and prosecuting those responsible, the government appears intent on punishing the messenger."

The exhibition highlighted politically motivated prosecutions of human rights defenders in India. It also documented mob violence by ultranationalist Hindus that has killed many Muslims, and hate speech by senior BJP leaders that has repeatedly incited violence against religious minorities, issues that have been well-documented by domestic and international rights groups.

The Association for Protection of Civil Rights said the Delhi police did not carry any notice or arrest

warrant when they traveled to the southern city of Bangalore to arrest Khan, in violation of due process. The police said they were investigating Khan and the APCR for allegedly "promoting enmity" between various groups, and for criminal conspiracy. The police complaint is based on a video posted on social media of Khan showing the exhibit, discussing specific cases of violence against Muslims and relevant court judgments. The video, posted on X by a BJP supporter who called for police action against the exhibit, was posted separately by a BJP minister a day later.

On December 3, the Delhi High Court granted Khan interim protection from arrest for three days and instructed him to cooperate with the police investigation.

The Association for Protection of Civil Rights has provided legal aid in a number of human rights cases across the country. These include defending activists wrongfully prosecuted under India's counterterrorism law, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, in a case relating to communal violence in Delhi in February 2020 in which 53 people, mostly Muslims, were killed.

The raid on the APCR is not an isolated case. Police in Uttar Pradesh state have accused Mohammed Zubair, cofounder of an independent fact-checking website, Alt News, of promoting enmity between different religious groups, as well as "endangering sovereignty, unity and integrity of India," for posting a video of a Hindu religious leader making Islamophobic remarks. On December 3, the judges hearing Zubair's case in Allahabad High

Court recused themselves and directed that the case be listed before another bench.

Zubair had posted a video showing the Hindu religious leader Yati Narsinghanand making derogatory remarks against the Prophet Muhammad in a speech on September 29. Narsinghanand has repeatedly called for violence against Muslims, and in January 2022 was arrested for making Islamophobic and misogynistic comments and spent a month in jail.

The police added charges of "endangering sovereignty" that could lead to Zubair's immediate arrest based on complaints. Zubair was previously arrested by Delhi police in 2022, on charges of hurting Hindu sentiments in a 2018 Twitter post. The police opposed bail, seized his electronic devices, and secured an order to hold him for 14 days in custody while they investigated. The Supreme Court granted bail saying that the "power of arrests must be pursued sparingly. In the present case, there is no justification to keep him in continued detention and subject him to an endless round of proceedings in various courts."

In the recent case, Zubair told the BBC that while a number of journalists, politicians, and media channels had also shared the video of Narsinghanand's latest speech on X, the police "are going after someone who's reporting hate speeches, while people giving hate speeches are going free." □□□

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 HUMRA QURAISHI'S COLUMN
 

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## 'Blood however is Blood'

*Humra Quraishi*

THE YEAR ENDING ON AN extremely worrying scenario. What, with bombardments and killings havoc on, in the Middle East. Mind you, Israel's targeted attacks spreading out, from Gaza and around, now on to Syria. The destruction peaking and together with that there seems an obvious expansionist design unfolding. Where and how will this end? And above all, when will it end? Hundreds and thousands of Palestinians, Lebanese and Syrians already ruined! Many more affected. The destruction ongoing. No signs of halt of this bloody destruction. Blood and blood-shed spreading out.

Commentators relaying that the situation in Syria is compounding as Israel and its allies fast intruding into its territory, along the expansionist strategies. I'm reminded of what Noam Chomsky had told me during the course an earlier given interview to me, over two decades back when he was visiting New Delhi. His comments of much significance. During the course of that interview when I'd asked Chomsky what changes he could foresee or apprehend in the changing world order, he detailed the havoc that could be unfolding as superpower America along with its allies could be furthering its strategies.

To quote Chomsky from that interview: "The threat of terrorism is not the only abyss into which we peer...an even greater threat is posed by the expansion arms race... term race is inappropriate because the USA is, for now, competing alone. Its goal is to achieve 'full spectrum dominance'. These plans have been available in the government documents

for some years and the projects outlined are being developed. They were expanded in the first months of the Bush administration and again after 11 September in a crude exploitation of the fear and horror engendered by these crimes ...it is conventional everywhere for attack to be 'defence' and this case is no exception. The plans for militarisation of space are disguised as 'ballistic missile defence' (BMD). And it is well understood that BMD even if technically feasible, must rely on satellite communication. And destroying satellites is far easier than shooting down missiles. This is one reason why the USA must seek full spectrum dominance; such overwhelming control of space that even the poor man's weapon's will not be available to an adversary...the goal of militarisation of space extends far beyond. The Clinton era publications announce the primary goal prominently - 'Dominating the space dimension of military operations. To protect US interests and investment.' Armies were needed 'during the westward expansion of continental United States'! Of course, in self defence against the indigenous population!"

And if one were to focus attention on our country, the communal situation is more than worrying. The recent uttering of a sitting judge of the Allahabad High Court could be termed alarming. Yes, alarming! Blatantly communal and along the typical Hindutva strain. One can well imagine the trickledown effect of such widespread bias and communal attitude against the minority Muslim community in the country.

Communally surcharged obnoxious comments, together with abu-

sive language have accelerated in these recent years. Several Right-Wing parliamentarians have used absolutely gutter abusive language in the context of the Muslims of the country. And they seem to have got away with all their utterances. Even the political rulers of the day who came up with hate speeches, giving one hate speech after another, have gone about unapologetic!

It wouldn't be incorrect to say that there stands out a definite pattern to target the Muslim community and their faith. Propaganda on. Made to take off along the various alibis, from many platforms and forums. Such is the extent of the negativities spread out about the Muslims of the country that it seems there exists a well-planned strategy of the Right-Wing to target the Muslims in a very systematic way. Heap all possible blame on them. Hit them along the economic and financial and social strain. Target their places of worship. Unleash fear in them. Spread out myths and misconceptions about them ...And the gullible are fed on this anti-Muslim diet, as the political mafia continues to flourish on the lethal combination of hate and hatred.

And as this poisonous and biased propaganda against the Muslims community goes about uncontrolled, the ground realities are turning bleaker and darker and worrying.

***Leaving you with these lines of Sahir Ludhianvi***

These lines of Sahir Ludhianvi from his poem 'Khoon phir khoon hai' (Blood, however, is blood) tucked in the volume 'A Celebration of Progressive Urdu Poetry—Anthems of Resistance' (IndiaInk/ Roli Books) by Ali Husain Mir and Raza Mir:

*Tyranny is but tyranny; when it grows  
it is vanquished  
Blood however is blood; if it spills it  
will congeal*



*It will congeal on the desert sands,  
on the murderer's hand  
On the brow of justice and on  
chained feet  
On the unjust sword, on the sacrifi-  
cial body  
Blood is blood; if it spills it will take  
root  
Let them hide all they want, skulk in  
their lairs  
The track of spilled blood will point  
out the executioners' abode  
Let conspiracies shroud the truth  
with darkness  
Each drop of blood will march out,  
holding aloft a lamp  
Say this to tyranny's worthless and  
dishonoured Destiny  
say this to Coercion's manipulative  
intent  
say this to Laila, the darling of the  
assembly  
Blood is wild, it will splatter and*

*stain your garment  
It is a rapid flame that will scorch  
your harvests  
That blood which you wished to  
bury in the killing fields  
has risen today in the streets and  
courts  
Somewhere as a flame, somewhere  
as a slogan. Somewhere else as a  
flung stone  
When blood flows bayonets cannot  
contain it  
When it raises its defiant head, laws  
will not restrain it  
Tyranny has no caste, no commu-  
nity, no status or dignity  
Tyranny is simply tyranny, from its  
beginning to its end  
Blood is however blood; it becomes  
a hundred things:  
Shapes that cannot be obliterated  
Flames that can never be extinguished  
Chants that will not be suppressed.*

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## REDEFINING NATIONALISM

### Who Are Anti-Nationals?

*\*Bhaskar Majumder*

**I**N INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, the question of whether a resident citizen of a particular sovereign state is considered a national is straightforward—one cannot avoid being a nationalist. Sovereignty is essential for the security of the resident people, and 'people' refers to the nation. Therefore, the concepts of national security and the nationalism of the people are interconnected.

Recently, some individuals have begun to redefine nationalism, distancing themselves from the perspectives articulated by thinkers like Rabindranath Tagore and others. These individuals, often described as troublemakers, have unfortunately gained the approval of the core state, which is reflected in its troubling silence on the matter. This silence may stem from the reluctant

acceptance of Hindu nationalism as a broader definition of nationalism. In a political democracy, the rule of the majority is frequently interpreted as an endorsement of Hindu nationalism in governance.

Nationalism is often unspoken and remains implicit in the everyday practices of individuals within interdependent roles. For instance, the teacher teaches, the farmer cultivates, the industrial worker labours in the factory, and the painter creates—all of which reflect nationalism because they contribute to the foundation of people's lives. Therefore, the essence of nationalism lies in ensuring the safety and well-being of individuals within a sovereign nation-state.

Does this imply that no one has the right to question the prevailing system? Or those individuals cannot

disagree and propose alternative ways to improve life? Here are two examples—one from a distant past and another recent—that encompass both internal and international contexts.

The years 1946-47 marked a significant period of decolonisation for British India, particularly during the communal riots of 1946. These riots involved two religious groups, reflecting the tensions surrounding the impending partition of British India into India and Pakistan. The partition displaced many residents and disrupted their sense of nationalism. It raises a logical question: how could a group of people, forced to abandon their geographic roots, transit from a sense of 'total nationalism' to 'partial nationalism'?

Through conversations with elderly Hindu Bengalis from East Pakistan after 1947, this writer learned that many continued to feel connected to East Bengal and were willing to return, albeit without fully grasping the implications of such a decision. The riots that foreshad-

owed partition also resulted in the loss of land, property, and important documents for many refugees.

Interestingly, some people chose to remain in East Pakistan until the 1971 War, a conflict that was allegedly provoked by West Pakistan, which ultimately led to the emergence of sovereign Bangladesh. The interplay of riots, independence, partition, and war illustrates one outcome in 1947 and another in 1971. Innocent people have always been the collateral damage of these events.

One may be puzzled about how and when nationalism became an “*agnipariksha*” for either the core state or the individuals involved during that time, and even afterwards, as refugees sought their “new residence” in West Bengal. After all, expressing nationalism necessitates a flag, which is typically provided by the sovereign state. The refugees transitioned from the Pakistan flag to the Indian flag post-1947.

A more recent example occurred in November 2024, when the electronic media in India announced the arrest of a Hindu religious “guru” in Bangladesh, leading to subsequent turmoil. One faction of Hindu nationalists began to portray this as an atrocity against Hindus in Bangladesh, with some even suggesting the possibility of waging war on Bangladesh, reminiscent of the 1971 war. This faction went so far

as to compare military tanks and other weaponry between the two sovereign neighbouring countries. It is important to remember that post-1971, Bangladesh is also a sovereign state.

A few years back India’s Hindu nationalism required hatred for Pakistan, chanting ‘*joy siaram*’, chanting ‘*bharat mata ki joy*’ and also cow-nationalism. Failure to adhere to any one or a combination of these practices could provoke anger from rowdy elements, potentially leading to lynching and other forms of violence. In November 2024, many influencers began abusing the Chief Minister of West Bengal, possibly under the mistaken belief that West Bengal is a sovereign state. It is important to remind these individuals that international issues, even those of a humanitarian nature, require the involvement of a recognised sovereign state—which West Bengal is not—and must be addressed according to established international rules and regulations.

The definition of Indian nationalism has boundaries that do not extend into incivility, even when using harsh adjectives and threatening punishment for those deemed “anti-national” on platforms like Facebook and Twitter. While social media does not significantly shape the opinions of the vast majority of people in India, the disruptive influence of these platforms cannot be ignored. The

issue becomes more complicated and flexible when it receives support from the state or when these social media influencers are encouraged by the state to use its terminology.

What type of nationalism is appropriate today? Should one speak against Bangladesh or foster divisions between Hindus and Muslims? Isn’t it more fitting for the largest democracy in the world to take a measured approach and develop soft diplomatic relations with neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka? All these nations are members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and they share a unified voice.

In truth narrow nationalism lacks value in international relations. The same applies to democracy at home, where political differences are inherent in the voting process.

Nationalism is the love that people have for the country they reside in. If it is genuine love, it cannot be coerced; anything that is forced is not authentic. Nationalism should not be an agenda dictated by the state; rather, it resides in the minds of the people and can even transcend national boundaries. Cosmopolitanism is not contrary to nationalism. People should not allow those who engage in pseudo-nationalism to operate a parallel state. □□□

[\*Professor (Retd.), G.B.Pant Social Science Institute Allahabad-211019]

## CITIZENSHIP TANGLE

### CAA—There are no Takers

*Rokibuz Zaman*

**T**HE PARENTS OF BIDYUT Kumar Biswas, a 49-year-old teacher at a government primary school in Nadia district of West Bengal, arrived in India just after the Bangladesh War in 1971.

Biswas said they fled their ances-

tral village in Jessore district in Bangladesh, as Hindus increasingly faced religious persecution.

“My father secretly sold his properties and land. He then told his neighbours that he was going away for a few days,” Biswas said. Over

the years, his father managed to register his and his family members’ names on voter lists and ration cards in India.

Biswas’s father was not alone. A study by Dhaka-based economist Abul Barkat estimated that between 1964 and 2013, as many as 11.3 million Hindus had fled Bangladesh.

Politically, this forms a significant electorate group in Assam and West Bengal.

In the 1960s, the Communists were able to get significant support from refugee groups. In 2009, the Trinamool Congress's attempts to win over the Matua Mahasangha—a socio-religious organisation of the Matuas, a group of politically influential immigrants from Bangladesh—bore fruit, and helped Mamata Banerjee dethrone the Left Front.

However, the Matuas drifted towards the Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP] after it began an aggressive campaign in 2015 to bring in amendments to India's Citizenship Act that would allow undocumented migrants from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh who had entered India before December 31, 2014, to become Indian citizens—as long as they were not Muslim.

The contentious proposals were seen as discriminatory towards Muslims and sparked widespread protests across the country, many of them led by Muslim women. In Delhi, communal riots broke out as a backlash to the protests, and the state cracked down on several Muslim activists—many of whom are still in prison.

But five years after the Citizenship Amendment Act [CAA] was passed on December 11, 2019, the law has not been of much use to those like Biswas.

"We were happy when the CAA was passed," said Biswas. "We are thankful to the Prime Minister for making the law. But the documents needed under the CAA rules make it harder to apply for citizenship".

Under the rules of the CAA, which were notified in March, applicants need to provide documents proving they came to India before December 31, 2014. Only six non-Muslim communities living in these three countries are eligible for amnesty under this law.

But several families of Hindu migrants from Bangladesh do not

have official documents issued by the government of Bangladesh to prove their country of origin.

Most of the Bengali refugees, largely from lower-caste groups, migrated from East Pakistan to escape religious persecution and discrimination in government treatment. Systematic attacks on their lives and destruction of their properties remained unaddressed by the persons in authority.

They are also wary of producing documents that attest to their being undocumented migrants. "How can we state in writing that we are from Bangladesh?" Biswas said. "What is the guarantee that we will not be targeted?"

Even BJP leaders believe that the law makes unreasonable demands on the applicants. "Many of these people arrived here 20-30 years ago under difficult circumstances," said Mohit Ray, a senior BJP leader from the refugee community in West Bengal. "They are mostly poor people, who have lived in temporary homes on barren lands or on the side of railway tracks. It is difficult for them to provide any documents. So that is becoming a big problem."

He said that the central government should revise the rules so that an affidavit, stating their place of origin, should be sufficient.

A Kolkata-based spokesperson of the BJP admitted there have been few takers for the law. "Only a few hundred people would have applied under the CAA," he said. "But the number of people who have come from Bangladesh after 1971 is in the millions."

The central government has not put out any official data on the number of migrants granted citizenship under the law.

The ruling Trinamool Congress's counter to the BJP's CAA pitch has been to deny its utility.

The Mamata Banerjee govern-

ment has said that the Hindu migrants of this region are already citizens of the state – and do not need to apply under the CAA. Instead, they might even put themselves at risk by declaring their foreign origin.

"The Trinamool Congress has portrayed [the CAA] as a conspiracy to brand the [lower-caste] Namasudra refugees as foreigners and deprive them of all kinds of rights and entitlements," said political scientist Ayan Guha, whose research focuses on the Matuas.

Sushanta Mandol, a local Matua leader of Bhatjangla panchayat in Nadia district, said: "The Trinamool Congress has been saying that those who have voter IDs, Aadhaar cards and who have voted in previous elections do not need to apply for citizenship. Therefore, our people are confused and at a loss what to do."

However, many migrant families said that without proof of citizenship, they faced hurdles—if not harassment—while applying for a passport or a government job or a Scheduled Caste certificate.

"When I went to the passport office, they asked me to produce a document to prove that my parents were here before 1971," said Biswas, who was born in India and joined government service in 2006. "I don't have any such documents."

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His passport application was rejected. “Didi [Mamata Banerjee] is saying that we have Aadhaar cards and voter cards that we are citizens and nobody can deport us. But the passport office is saying we are not citizens. This is confusing,” Biswas said.

For the Matuas, a vocal group within the larger immigrant community, citizenship goes beyond mere paperwork—it is an opportunity to shrug off the tag of “infiltrators” and Bangladeshis for good.

“In the government offices and courts in Krishnanagar, if a person belongs to the Matua or Namashudra caste, they label him or her as Bangladeshi even if he came before or after the Partition,” said Sushanta Mandol. “They ask us for documents from before 1971. If we get an Indian citizen certificate, this harassment will stop,” Mandol said.

However, assurances from the Centre have not been enough to convince the Matuas or other Hindu groups from applying under the CAA.

“I am not going to get worried about CAA now,” said 44-year-old Ashim Pal, a resident of Shantipur in Nadia district whose family came to India after 1980 from Kushtia district in Bangladesh. “We will see if and when it becomes compulsory.”

Pal went on to argue: “We are already citizens. Our votes have made politicians MPs and MLAs. If we are not citizens, how come they are getting elected? If voter ID cards can procure everything, why do we need to apply for citizenship again?”

Though the BJP has considerable influence on the Hindu immigrant voters—BJP’s Shantanu Thakur, a senior Matua leader was elected to the Lok Sabha this May from Bongaon—party workers are worried about the implications of the unfulfilled promise of the CAA. In truth there is a “sense of discontent” in the refugee community, which has not yet been expressed openly.

Saradindu Biswas, a social activist from the Matua community, said that the BJP cannot take the

community’s support for granted. “The Matuas will not stay with the BJP for a long time because they have understood that the party is playing with them,” he said. “The other refugee groups, who are bigger in number, are not that bothered by the CAA. Whatever happens, they know they will not go back to Bangladesh and they refuse to identify as infiltrators to apply for the CAA.”

For the BJP, the current religious turmoil in Bangladesh, with Hindu homes and temples being attacked, is a clear vindication of the logic of the CAA. “However, it is also leading to the demand for extending the cut-off date of the CAA beyond December 3, 2014,” said Guha.

Local BJP leaders have aggressively mobilised on the issue of endangered Hindus in Bangladesh. Some are also demanding that the CAA’s cut-off date be extended to accommodate those fleeing violence in Bangladesh. □□□

[Source: Scroll.in]

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## THE PALESTINE QUESTION

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### Calls for Justice and Liberation

**Susan Abulhawa**

[Following is a speech delivered by Susan Abulhawa at Oxford Union on November 28, 2024. Abulhawa, the daughter of Palestinians displaced during the 1967 war and the founder of the NGO Playgrounds for Palestine, laid bare the historical and ongoing struggles of her people under Israeli occupation.]

**A**DDRESSING THE CHALLENGE of what to do about the indigenous inhabitants of the land, Heim Weizmann, a Russian Jew, said to the World Zionist Congress in 1921 that the Palestinians were akin to the rocks of Judea—obstacles that had to be cleared on a difficult path. David Ben-Gurion, a Polish Jew who changed his name to sound relevant to the region, said, ‘We must expel Arabs and take their places.’

There are thousands of such conversations amongst early Zionists who

plotted and implemented the violent colonisation of Palestine and the annihilation of her native people. But they were only partially successful, murdering or ethnically cleansing 80% of Palestinians, which meant that 20% of Palestinian people remained an enduring obstacle to their colonial fantasies.

Zionists lamented Palestinian presence and debated publicly in all circles—political, academic, social, and cultural—regarding what to do with Palestinian people, what to do about the Palestinian birthright, about their

babies, which they dubbed a demographic threat. Benny Morris once expressed regret that Ben-Gurion did not finish the job of getting rid of them all, which would have obviated what they referred to as the ‘Arab problem.’ Benjamin Netanyahu once bemoaned a missed opportunity during the 1989 Tiananmen Square uprising to expel large swaths of the Palestinian population while the world’s attention was focused on China.

Some of their articulated solutions to the nuisance of Palestinian existence included the ‘break their bones’ policy in the 1980s and 1990s, ordered by Yitzhak Rabin. That horrific policy, which crippled generations of Palestinians, did not succeed in making people leave. Frustrated by Palestinian resilience, a new discourse arose, especially after a massive natural gas field was discovered off the



coast of northern Gaza worth trillions of dollars. This new discourse is echoed in the words of Colonel Efraim Eitan, who said in 2004, 'We have to kill them all.'

Aaron Sofer, an Israeli so-called intellectual and political adviser, insisted in 2018 that 'we have to kill and kill, all day, every day.' When I was in Gaza, I saw a little boy, no more than nine years old; whose hands and part of his face had been blown off from a booby-trapped can of food the soldiers had left behind for Gaza's starving children. I later learned that they had also left poison food for people in Shuja'iyya and booby-trapped toys in southern Lebanon.

The harm they do is diabolical, and yet they expect you to believe they are the victims, invoking Europe's Holocaust and screaming 'anti-Semitism.' They expect you to suspend fundamental human reason to believe that the daily sniping of children with so-called 'kill shots' and the bombing of entire neighbourhoods that bury families alive is self-defence.

They want you to believe that a man who had not eaten a thing in over 72 hours, who kept fighting even when all he had was one functioning arm, was motivated by some innate savagery or irrational hatred, rather than the indomitable yearning to see his people free in their own homeland.

The issue is not whether Israel is an apartheid or genocidal state. This debate is ultimately about the worth of Palestinian lives—about the worth of Palestinian schools, research centres, books, art, and dreams. It is about the worth of homes, which contain the memories of generations, and the worth of humanity and agency.

If the roles were reversed—if Palestinians had spent the last eight decades stealing Jewish homes, expelling, oppressing, imprisoning, poisoning, torturing, raping, and killing

them—there would be no debate about whether that constituted terrorism or genocide.

This house resolution, though well-meaning and appreciated, is of little consequence in the midst of this Holocaust of present time.

I'm here for the sake of history—to speak to generations not yet born and for the chronicles of this extraordinary time, where the carpet bombing of defenceless indigenous societies is legitimised. I'm here for my grandmothers, both of whom died as penniless refugees while foreign Jews lived in their stolen homes.

I also came to speak directly to Zionists, here and everywhere. We let you into our homes when your own countries tried to murder you and everyone else turned away. We fed, clothed, and sheltered you. And when the time was ripe, you kicked us out of our own homes and homeland, then killed and robbed and burned and looted our lives. You carved out our hearts because it is clear you do not know how to live in the world without dominating others.

No matter what happens from here, no matter what fairy tales you tell yourself and tell the world, you will never truly belong to that land. You will never understand the sacredness of the olive trees, which you've been cutting down and burning for decades just to spite us and break our hearts a little more. You will not erase us, no matter how many of us you kill all day, every day. We are not the rocks that Heim Weizmann thought you could clear from the land. We are its very soil. We are her rivers and her trees and her stories.

Someday, your impunity and arrogance will end. Palestine will be free. She will be restored to her multi-religious, multi-ethnic, pluralistic glory. We will restore and expand the trains that run from Cairo to Gaza to Jerusalem, Haifa, Tripoli, Beirut, Damascus, Amman, and beyond. You will either leave, or you will finally learn to live with others as equals. □□□

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'SHARMAJI' IS NO MORE

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## Jagjit Singh Sohal

*Harsh Thakor*

**J**AGJIT SINGH SOHAL ALIAS Sharma, one of the premier leaders of the Communist Revolutionary Movement of India and one of the pioneers of the Naxalite movement and CPI(ML) in Punjab, passed away on October 20th, after dodging the police for almost six decades.

Sohal, who hailed from Shampur village in Sangrur district, was a contemporary of Jagir Singh Joga, Satpal Dang and Harkishan Singh Surjit. He was part of the Communist Party of India when it was headquartered in Lahore.

He devoted with unflinching resilience seven decades from his 96 years long life in the revolutionary struggle on behalf of the downtrodden and exploited masses. When Jagjit Singh, as a resident of Shahpur village in Sangrur district, entered his youth, the communist movement, which was battling to extinguish the exploitive system, was sweeping at a wave creating a new history of people's liberation struggles across the world. In India too, the revolutionary struggles under the Communist leadership were rapidly intensifying as a coherent force to abolish the oppressive system based on extreme injustice and inequality. The tenant peasant movement of Pepsu (Patiala and eastern Punjab princely states union) was shimmering by heavily smashing headquarters of feudalism. At that time, a large number of young people sacri-

ficed their personal careers and joined the communist movement to shape the future of the whole society. The family of Jagjeet Singh was also associated with the communist movement inspired Jagjit Singh into turning into a communist. Jagjit Singh also relinquished his post of a primary teacher in young age and decided to devote his life to the cause of people's liberation. After that decision, there was no looking back.

At a very young age, he associated himself with the Pepsu movement and was dedicated to the task of realising the dream of true people's democratic state through revolutionary resistance of workers and peasants. From the Lal Communist Party of Hind Union, CPI, CPM and CPI (ML) to the present Maoist stream he shimmered the red torch for a glorious history of seven decades.

With his firm theoretical dedication based on an intensive study of communist ideology, he rose from the ranks of an ordinary party member to become a prominent leader at the Punjab and India level, holding historical responsibilities at various leadership levels in the communist revolutionary movement.

After Charu Majumdar's death, he became general secretary of the central organising committee of the CPI (Marxist-Leninist) in 1974. Since then, he led an underground life. He became active at the very advent of the Naxalite movement in Punjab and was an integral part of founding leadership team of the CPI (ML).

He played a pivotal role in uniting the communist revolutionary forces divided into groups by self critically reviewing the left sectarian

political line and practice of the CPI (ML) in the 1970s, correcting the errors and recognising the historical achievements. Instead of dogmatic rhetoric, he was sincere in his understanding of the concrete situation of the country. With relentless courage and enduring tenacity he steered activists to valiantly withstand the wave of merciless attacks of the state.

Earlier this year in February, it was the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Central Organising Committee of the CPI (ML), of which Sohal held post of secretary. The significance of Sohal's contribution was his role in the self-critical report of the Central Organising Committee in 1974, which paved the way to rectify trend of left adventurism within the Communist Revolutionary camp, and formation of groups like CPI (ML) Party Unity, People's War etc. Sohal, in tandem with Suniti Kumar Ghosh and Kondappali Seetharamiah made a critical review of the policy of 'annihilation of class enemies', and slogan 'China's chairman is our chairman.'

From 1983 he operated as a central leader in the CPIML (Party Unity). Till the last straw he rejected the parliamentary path.

His five-decade-long underground life was an example of resilience, sacrifice and conviction of communist revolutionaries who ignited the spark of New-Democratic Revolution in India.

"Sharmaji was hale and hearty till his last breath, standing besides the oppressed and had no regrets," said his wife Vimal, who while doing PhD at Panjab University, Chandigarh, in the late sixties, also went underground with him. Sohal was eulogised in a Punjabi biographical novel "Panna Ekk Itihaas Da" by Baru Satwarg. □□□

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## A NEW HORIZON

## Short Film: An Overview\*

Abhijit Guha

Short film is a great first step for a budding filmmaker. That's how I made my beginnings, and Oberhausen was an important step on my path to become a director. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_Short\\_Film\\_Festival\\_Oberhausen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Short_Film_Festival_Oberhausen) accessed on 14.12.2024).—**Roman Polanski**

SHORT FILMS DO NOT ENJOY the same status in the world of movies like short stories in literature. The short stories by Nikolai Gogol, Anton Chekhov, Guy de Maupassant and Rabindranath Thakur are better known than short films made by Taika Waititi,<sup>1</sup> Andrea Arnold,<sup>2</sup> Nacho Vigalondo,<sup>3</sup> Marshall Curry<sup>4</sup> and Kartiki Gonsalves<sup>5</sup> who are little known names. They made great short films. Andrea Arnold, a British short film maker, for example, had won an Academy Award for her short film *Wasp* in 2005. Charlie Chaplin made a good number of short films, like *Behind the Screen* (23 minutes), *A Busy Day* (6 minutes), *The Masquerader* (13 minutes) and many others. In India, Satyajit Ray also directed short films. Ray's famous short films among others are *Two* (12 minutes) and *The Inner Eye* (20 minutes). Recently, the documentary short film from India *The Elephant Whisperers* (39 minutes) made by Kartiki Gonsalves had won the Oscar in 2023, at the 95th Academy Awards film festival held at Hollywood, Los Angeles. Serious research on short films has also begun with surveys on the audience and revealed that 'Various people have different ideas of time, and for some, a 20-minute short film is a long time... In less than half an hour, the Oscar-winning short films examine one strong social topic issue after another. Even if it isn't an Oscar-winning short film, a short film can teach you to think' (Jia 2023). [Analysis of Short Film from the Perspective of Filmmakers and Audiences. [Jia, Lu (2023). Analysis of Short Film from the Perspective of Filmmakers and Audiences. The In-

ternational Conference on Interdisciplinary Humanities and Communication Studies DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/3/2022978].

Among the oldest film festivals dedicated to short films are Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival, France (since 1979), Tampere Film Festival, Finland (since 1969) and International Short Film Festival Oberhausen, Germany (since 1954). All of them are among the most important short film festivals in the world.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences defines a short film as "an original motion picture that has a running time of not more than 40 minutes including all credits". ([https://www.oscars.org/sites/oscars/files/202404/97th\\_oscars\\_complete\\_rules.pdf](https://www.oscars.org/sites/oscars/files/202404/97th_oscars_complete_rules.pdf) accessed on 04.12.2024) Documentaries are regarded as short films. In 2019 The 91st Academy Awards Committee defined a documentary film: An eligible documentary film is defined as a theatrically released nonfiction motion picture dealing creatively with cultural, artistic, historical, social, scientific, economic or other subjects. It may be photographed in actual occurrence, or may employ partial reenactment, stock footage, stills, animation, stop-motion or other techniques, as long as the emphasis is on fact and not on fiction ([https://www.oscars.org/sites/oscars/files/91aa\\_short\\_subject.pdf](https://www.oscars.org/sites/oscars/files/91aa_short_subject.pdf) accessed on 03.12.2024).

So, all documentaries are short films but all short films are not documentaries. Documentaries are non-fictional.

In a recent period a new subfield named visual anthropology has been

growing within anthropology which has an interesting past. It began with a famous film named *Nanook of the North* (1922), which is a feature length documentary depicting the life of the Inuit people (popularly known as the Eskimos) of the arctic region by a non-anthropologist director Robert Flaherty. It was screened by Midnapore Film Society. Gradually, making of films on anthropological subjects increased and anthropologists are currently engaged in a dual activity: (i) making films and (ii) analysing existing films through an anthropological lens (Chio, Jenny. (2021) 2023. ("Visual anthropology". In *The Open Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, edited by Felix Stein. Facsimile of the first edition in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology*. <http://doi.org/10.29164/21visual> accessed on 04.12.2024).

It is not only in anthropology but short films are gradually gaining popularity all over the world on the silver screen. Let Midnapore Film Society be a pioneer in propagating short films. This writer wishes a long life of short films.

(The author is grateful to Midnapore Film Society (estd. in 1963) which circulated this article on the occasion of the Ritwik Ghatak Short Film Festival organized by the Society during 7-8 December 2024 at Midnapore.)

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### Reference :

- 1 Taika Waititi (b.1975) is a New Zealand filmmaker, actor and comedian. Waititi's 2003 short film *Two Cars, One Night* earned him an Academy Award nomination for Best Live Action Short Film.
- 2 Andrew Arnold (b.1961) is an English filmmaker and former actress.
- 3 Nacho Vigalondo (b.1977) is a Spanish film maker. His eight minutes duration short film *7:35 in the Morning* was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Short Film.
- 4 Marshall Curry (b.1970) is an American film maker. His short film *A Night at the Garden* was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Documentary in 2017.
- 5 Kartiki Gonsalves (b.1986) is an Indian film director.

## SYRIA'S FUTURE

## Dawn in Damascus?

*Vijay Prashad*

**A**S THE REBEL FORCES LED by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (Syria Liberation Committee) seized Damascus, Syria's capital, on December 7, 2024, the president of Syria, Bashar al-Assad boarded a flight to Moscow, Russia. It was the end of the rule of the Assad family that began when Hafez al-Assad (1930-2000) became president in 1971, and continued through his son Bashar from 2000—a 53-year period of rule. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which seized Damascus, was formed out of the remnants of the al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusra (Front for the Conquest of Syria) in 2017, and led by its emir Abu Jaber Shaykh and its military commander Abu Mohammed al-Jolani.

For the past seven years, HTS has been restrained in the city of Idlib, in Syria's north. In 2014, a group of al-Qaeda veterans created the Khorasan network (led by Sami al-Uraydi, the religious leader), whose intent was to control the city and the Islamist movements. Over the next year, al-Nusra tried to form alliances with other Islamist forces, such as Ahrar al-Sham, particularly for the governance of the city. The Russian military intervention in 2015 damaged the ability of these groups to advance out of Idlib, which led to the formal break of many of the Islamists from al-Qaeda in 2016 and the creation of HTS in January 2017. Those who remained linked to al-Qaeda formed Hurras al-Din (or Guardians of the Religious Organisation). By the end of the year, HTS had seized the initiative and become the major force inside Idlib, took over the local councils across the city and declared that it

was the home of the Syrian Salvation Government. When the Syrian Arab Army, the government's military force, moved toward Idlib in early 2020, Turkey invaded Syria's north to defend the Islamists. This invasion resulted in the Russian-Turkish ceasefire in March 2020 that allowed the HTS and others to remain in Idlib unscathed. HTS rebuilt its ranks through alliances with Turkish-backed armed forces and with fighters from across Central Asia (including many Uyghur fighters from the Turkistan Islamic Party).

Operation Deterrence of Aggression, launched by HTS in November 2024 with Turkish and Israeli support, whipped down highway M5 from Aleppo to Damascus in about fourteen days. The Syrian Arab Army dissolved before them and the gates of Damascus opened without enormous bloodshed.

The surprise victory of HTS had been predicted in November by Iranian officials, who informed Assad about the weakness of the state's defences because of the sustained Israeli attacks on Syrian army positions, of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and of the war in Ukraine. When Iran's foreign minister Abbas Araghchi met with Assad in Damascus after Aleppo fell to the rebels, Assad told Araghchi that this was not a defeat but a "tactical retreat." That was clearly illusionary. Araghchi, knowing this, told Assad that Iran simply did not have the capacity to send new troops to defend Damascus. It had also been made clear to the Assad government that the Russians did not have the surplus capacity to defend the government, not even the Russian naval base in

Tartus. During the HTS drive against the Syrian army, the Russian presidential envoy for Syria Alexander Lavrentyev said that he had been in touch with the incoming Trump administration to discuss a deal between "all parties" over the Syrian conflict. Neither Russia nor Iran believed that the Assad government would be able to unilaterally defeat the various rebels and remove the United States from its occupation of the eastern oil fields. A deal was the only way out, which meant that neither Iran nor Russia was willing to commit more troops to defend the Assad government.

Since 2011, Israel's air force has struck several Syrian military bases, including bases that hosted Iranian troops. These strikes degraded Syrian military capacity by destroying ordinance and materiel. Since October 2023, Israel has increased its strikes within Syria, including hitting Iranian forces, Syrian air defenses, and Syrian arms production facilities. On December 4, the heads of the militaries of Iran (Chief of Staff Major General Mohammad Bagheri), Iraq (Major General Yahya Rasool), Russia (Defense Minister Andrey Belousov), and Syria (General Abdul Karim Mahmoud Ibrahim) met to assess the situation in Syria. They discussed the movement of HTS down from Aleppo and agreed that with the fragile ceasefire in Lebanon and the Syrian government's weakened forces, this was a "dangerous scenario." While they said that they would support the government in Damascus, there were no concrete steps taken by them. The Israeli attacks inside Syria meanwhile increased the demoralization within the Syrian army, which has not been properly reorganized after the stalemate began with the rebels in Idlib in 2017.

When Russia entered the conflict



in Syria in 2015, the Russian military command insisted that the Syrian government no longer permit pro-government militia groups (such as the Kataeb al-Ba'ath and the Shabbiha) to operate independently. Instead, these groups were integrated into the Fourth and Fifth Corps under Russian command. Meanwhile, the Iranian officers organised their own battalions of Syrian soldiers. The soldiers' declining economic standards combined with the foreign command accelerated the demoralisation. Even the Republican Guard, tasked with defending Damascus and in particular the presidential palace, had lost much of its historical power.

At no point after 2011 was the Syrian government in control of the territory of the country. Already, since 1973, Israel had seized the Golan Heights. Then, during 2011, Turkey had eaten into the borderlands of northern Syria, while the Kurdish resistance forces (YPG and PKK) had formed a zone alongside the Syria-Turkey border. Northwestern Syria had been taken by the rebels, who included not only HTS but also a range of Turkish-backed militia groups. Northeastern Syria was occupied by the United States, which had taken charge of the oil fields. In this region, the US forces contested the Islamic State, which had been pushed out of both northern Iraq and northeastern Syria, but which continued to appear in spurts. Meanwhile, in southern Syria, the government had made a series of hasty agreements with the rebels to provide an appearance of peace. In cities such as Busra al-Sham, Daraa, Houran, and Tafas, the government could not send any of its officials; these, like Idlib, had come under rebel control. When HTS moved on Damascus, the rebels in the south rose up as did the rebels in the country's eastern edge along the

border with Iraq. The reality of Assad's weakness became apparent.

As if in a coordinated fashion, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu went to the occupied Golan Heights, which Israel seized from Syria in 1973, and announced, "This is a historic day in the history of the Middle East." He then said that his government had ordered the Israeli army to invade the UN buffer zone between the Israeli occupation of Golan and the Syrian army posts that had been established during the armistice of 1974. Israeli tanks moved into the countryside of Quneitra Governorate and took over the main town. The border between Israel and Syria has now been shaped by this invasion, since Israel has now moved several kilometres into Syria to seize almost the entire length of the border.

During the final days of the HTS advance to Damascus, the Israeli air force provided the rebels with air support. They bombed military bases and the headquarters of Syrian intelligence in the centre of Damascus. With the excuse that they wanted to destroy weapons depots before the rebels seized them, the Israelis struck bases that housed Syrian troops and stockpiles of weapons that the Syrian army might have used to defend Damascus (this included the Mezzah Air Base). Israeli officials have said that they will continue these air strikes, but have not indicated whom they plan to target.

The Israeli assault on Syria deepened during the protest movement in 2011. As fighting between the rebels and the Syrian government spread across southern Syria, near the Israeli border, Israel began to fire across the border at Syrian forces. In March 2013, for instance, the Israelis fired missiles at Syrian military posts, weakening them and strengthening the rebels. At the end of 2013, Israel created Division 210, a special military

command, to begin engagements along the Israel-Syrian armistice line. Importantly, when the HTS predecessor and al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra began to make gains along the Israeli line of control, Israel did not strike them. Instead, Israel hit the Syrian government through shooting down Syrian air force jets and assassinating senior Syrian allies (such as General Mohammad Ali Allahdadi, an Iranian general, in January 2015, and Samir Kuntar, a Fatah leader, in late 2015). A former press officer in Damascus told this writer that the Israelis effectively provided air support for the HTS assault on the capital.

Assad left Syria without making any announcement. It is said by former government officials in Damascus that some senior leaders left with him or left for the Iraqi border before the fall of Damascus. The silence from Assad has bewildered many Syrians who had believed fundamentally that the state would protect them from the onslaught of groups such as HTS. It is a sign of the collapse of the Assad government that his Republican Guard did not try to defend the city and that he left without any words of encouragement to his people.

The country is polarised regarding the new government. Sections of the population that had seen their way of life degraded by the war and sanctions welcome the opening, and they have been on the streets celebrating the new situation. The larger context for the Middle East is not their immediate concern, although depending on Israel's actions, this might change. A considerable section is concerned about the behaviour of the Islamists, who use terms of disparagement against non-Sunni Muslims such as nusayriyya (for Alawites, the community of the al-Assad family) and rawafid (such as the large Shia population in Syria). Calling non-Sunni Muslims

ahl al-batil or the “lost ones” and using strong Salafi language about apostasy and its punishment sets in motion fear amongst those who might be targets of attacks. Whether the new government will be able to control its forces motivated by this sectarian ideology remains to be seen.

Such sectarianism is only the

opening of the contradictions that will emerge almost immediately. How will the new government deal with the Israeli, Turkish, and US incursions into Syrian territory? Will it seek to win back that land? What will be the relationship between the Syrian government and its neighbours, particularly Lebanon?

Will the millions of Syrian refugees return to their home now that the basis for their migration has been removed, and if they return, what will be awaiting them inside Syria? And centrally, what will all this mean for the ongoing genocide of the Palestinians by the Israelis? □□□

[Source: counter currents.org]

## LETTERS

### George Joseph

George Joseph was a key public figure in the national life of early twentieth century India. He was a civil rights activist, trade union leader, and brilliant journalist. Joseph was a dedicated nationalist who worked with giants of the Indian freedom movement like Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, and C. Rajagopalachari. George Joseph was born on 5 June 1887 in an upper middle class Syrian Christian family in Changanaseeri in the Travancore State. Joseph did his higher education from the Madras Christian College, the University of Edinburgh, and finally took a law degree from the Middle Temple, London. He moved to Madurai for practising law. It was in Madurai that George Joseph was initiated into public life. There he legally fought for the rights of the PIRAMALAI KALLARS, a tribal community. The state had labelled the Kallars a criminal tribe under the oppressive Criminal Tribes Act, 1911. He also got involved in labour activism. Joseph and Ramanathan, a member of the Justice Party, organised the workers of the mills in Madurai to set up the Madurai Labour Union. In the meantime, Joseph became active in the campaign for Home Rule led by Ms Annie Besant. Indeed, Joseph was a member of the first Home Rule Deputation sent to England by Ms Besant. When Gandhiji started the non-cooperation movement, Jo-

seph gave up his legal profession. In the early 1920s he took to journalism. He served for a while as the editor of Motilal Nehru's *The Independent* and Gandhiji's *Young India*. George Joseph participated in the historic Vaikom Satyagraha. Indeed, he led the Satyagraha for some time. Gandhiji and George Joseph strongly disagreed on the purpose of Vaikom Satyagraha. To Gandhiji the Satyagraha was about asserting the rights of low caste Hindus to enter the Lord Mahadeva temple at Vaikom and to use the roads surrounding the temple. Joseph differed and argued that it was a fight to secure the civil rights to access the public roads. Joseph continued to disagree with the Congress leadership on various issues. The bitter communal polarisation in the country also unnerved him. For a short period, he joined the Justice Party but soon returned to the Congress. In 1937, he was elected to the Central Legislative Assembly. He passed away on 5 March 1938. George Joseph lived a life marked by honesty, forthrightness, and a commitment to the Indian Nation.

**Visakh S M**

### Americans Have No Choice

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 exploitative 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. They chose the first one. So, for them, gone is a genocidal president too hypocritical to admit it. And in comes a

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genocidal president who wears it as a badge of honour.

### **Rudra Sen, Brrackpore, WB Asmaul Was Tortured**

There is a serious case of human rights violation involving Mr Asmaul Sardar, son of Mr Ajjgar Sardar, residing in Hakimpur village, under Swarupnagar Police Station, North 24 Parganas district. The incident in question occurred between 2nd November and 4th November 2024, during which Mr. Sardar was allegedly subjected to physical torture and ill-treatment by the personnel of the Border Security Force (BSF).

On 2nd November 2024, Mr. Asmaul Sardar, a farmer from Swarupnagar, North 24 Parganas, was stopped by the BSF while driving a private car. Although no illegal items were initially found, he was taken to Tarali Mini BOP, where he was allegedly tied upside down to a tree and tortured for hours. On 4th November, the BSF claimed to have recovered 400 locks and Rs 11,200 in cash from the car and confiscated them. Mr Asmaul later admitted to being involved in smuggling due to lack of local employment opportunities and was taken for medical treatment before being released.

Victim was not handed over to local police; rather he was subjected to illegal confinement and torture in custody. While any unlawful activities must be addressed within the framework of law, it is deeply concerning that Mr Sardar was subjected to inhumane treatment and torture, which is a blatant violation of his fundamental rights. As per Article 21 of the Indian Constitution and the directives of the Supreme Court of India, any person in custody is entitled to be treated with dignity and cannot be subjected to torture or degrading treatment.

MASUM has urged the Acting Chairperson of National Human

Rights Commission to intervene and stop human rights violations by the BSF personnel.

**Kirity Roy**  
**Secretary, MASUM &**  
**National Convener, PACTI**

### **From the Depths of Neglect**

Despite being outlawed, the practice of manual scavenging continues to claim the lives of sewer workers across India. In 2024 alone, there has been a surge in fatalities in Delhi region.

These deaths not only expose the grave neglect towards the safety of workers but also point out the lack of enforcement of laws that prohibit manual scavenging.

Each year hundreds of lives are lost in the line of duty. These workers, who mostly come from marginalised communities, underprivileged and uneducated backgrounds, are exposed to life-threatening risks as they carry out manual scavenging. Unfortunately, most of these deaths occur due to the lack of safety measures, improper equipment, no training and supervision, and negligence by hiring authorities. Although there are provisions that criminalise manual scavenging and mandate rehabilitation for workers, they are not invoked during investigations of sewer worker deaths. In many cases, the administration fails to recognise that a worker's death occurred while engaged in manual scavenging, thus preventing the family from receiving the proper compensation or justice.

Additionally, the lack of awareness about the Manual Scavenging Act (2013) among law enforcement officials is another contributing factor to the continued exploitation of sewer workers.

In addition to the tragic loss of life among sewer workers, those employed on a contractual basis

face grave exploitation and mistreatment. Many contractual sewer workers are denied fair wages, proper safety equipment, and social security. These workers face arbitrary dismissal, wage theft, and removal or suspension for raising concerns about their oppressive work. In November 2023, hundreds of contractual sewer workers were unpredictably removed by contractors working for the Delhi Jal Board (DJB), with no prior notice, and had not received their pending salaries for several months.

The Dalit Adivasi Shakti Adhikar Manch (DASAM), in collaboration with various organisations, has focused its efforts on facilitating contractual sewer workers and meeting administrative bodies to resolve their issues. Given the present situation, DASAM organised a public hearing on 28th December, 2024 with the aim of bringing together sewer and septic tank workers, families of victims of manual scavenging, unions, government officials, researchers, academicians, and members of civil society, examining the role of public and private institutions in this continuous crisis and providing a platform for the families and workers to voice their testimonies and explore the deep-rooted causes of these tragedies, exploitation.

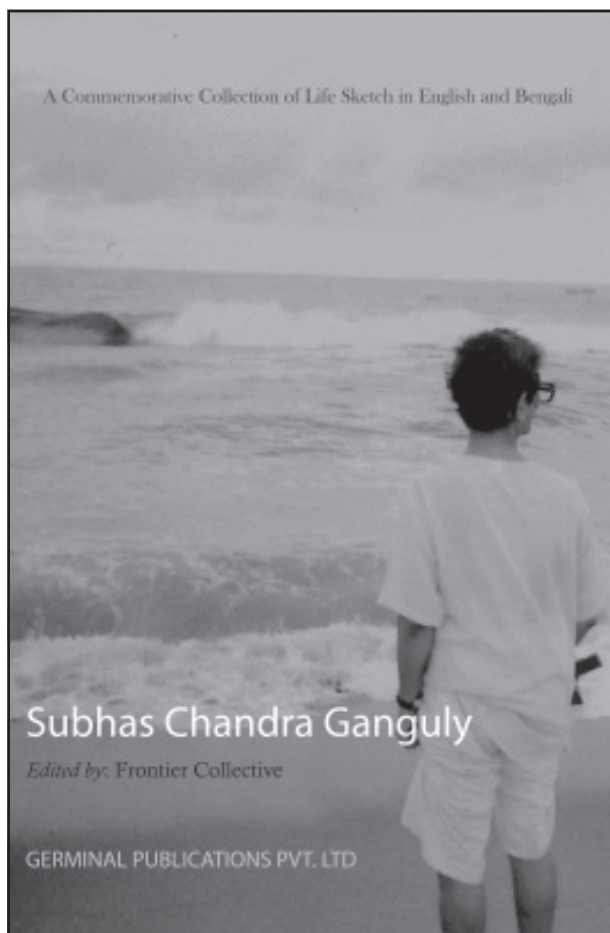
**DASAM**

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