

# frontier

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*“This is not just Israeli Genocide...”*

**N**OW THE LAST FUNCTIONING HOSPITAL IN GAZA IS GONE. In Gaza those who are still alive may envy the dead. The plight of the wounded and injured defies description. Then children and women are badly affected. The year 2024 was the worst for children worldwide. As per UNICEF report 479 million children have been affected in conflict zones and 43 million were displaced, mostly in the global South..

The world has watched hospitals bombed, children burned, and doctors hunted down. Destroying healthcare systems is a genocidal tactic to accelerate death. ‘Doctors Against Genocide’, a humanitarian organisation, demands action—an immediate ceasefire in the Middle East, protection for hospitals, and accountability for crimes against humanity. But Israel is not listening and a cease-fire is unlikely to be effected anytime soon, notwithstanding endless negotiations in Doha. Israel is delaying the process but Hamas is no less responsible in showing rigidity.

A number of medical personnel were burned to death in the fire allegedly set by the occupation forces in Kamal Adwan Hospital in Gaza. The Israeli military has stormed Kamal Adwan Hospital in northern Gaza, forcing doctors and patients to walk on foot to the southern part of the region. The hospital’s director, Dr Hussam Abu Safiya, is reportedly threatened with arrest. Israeli military, however, says, ‘a small fire in an empty building was unrelated to its activity’. They deny Hamas claims that troops set fire to north Gaza’s Kamal Adwan Hospital. Most Arab states didn’t believe Israel’s contention. Nor do human rights bodies working at international level subscribe to Israel’s defence arguments. In a statement released by the United Nations on December 29, 2024, a group of independent rights experts slammed Israel for defying international humanitarian law and inflicting maximum suffering on civilians. The Director - General of WHO too condemned Israel’s use of force against hospitals in Gaza.

Israeli forces reportedly burned operating rooms, surgery, laboratory, maintenance, and emergency units at Kamal Adwan Hospital. The fire has now started spreading to all buildings of Kamal Adwan Hospital. All medical services in the northern Gaza Strip have been suspended. The army is said to be forcibly transferring patients under threat of arms to the Indonesian hospital.

The Israeli army stormed the Kamal Adwan Hospital after besieging it

and issuing evacuation orders. Hundreds of wounded, patients, doctors and nurses are in the hospital and their fate is unknown.

A doctor working at the European Gaza Hospital died as a result of the severe cold. His body was found inside his tent in the Al-Mawasi area west of Khan Yunis city.

Gaza children freeze to death due to cold and lack of shelter. Winter blankets and supplies have been stuck for months waiting for approval to enter Gaza. And UN is helpless; it is not allowed to do humanitarian relief work.

As clarity on Israel's planned

genocide with the tacit approval of the US grows, so does the international community's silence.

"This is not just an Israeli genocide—this is an Israeli, European and US genocide!" Today's imperialism represented by the Global North with 49 countries, is in reality fascism. And fascism means war, war on the vast majority of the world's population spreading over 145 countries in the Global South. The underdeveloped and underprivileged countries in the South bloc are too disunited to challenge the North. So they are suffering. Even in case of Israel-Hamas war they look divided. So

Israel can have its way in contravention of all international laws and the so-called Geneva conventions. So hospitals are their legitimate target under spacious plea that they are actually sheltering terrorists.

The Global North is an integrated military, political and economic bloc led by the US and Israel is an integral part of this grouping. The leftists across the world talk of fascism very loosely and yet there is no urgency to develop an international anti-fascist front as it was developed during the Second World War. □□□

31.12.2024

[Contributed]

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## COMMENT

### 75 Years down the Line

**I**NDIAN PARLIAMENT SPENT two days discussing the Indian Constitution. While the Opposition leaders argued that Indian Constitution has a large space for enhancement of the rights of weaker sections of society, for religious minorities among others, they are suffering terribly. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders within the Parliament and its ideologues outside the parliament, argued that all the ills of society and violation of Constitutional values began with Nehru (Amendment to stop hate speech), via Indira Gandhi (Emergency), via Rajiv Gandhi (Shah Bano Bill) to Rahul Gandhi (tearing the bill) have been the violators of the values of Constitution.

They say Indian Constitution has been based on Western values, a colonial imprint on the society; it is a break from India's civilisation and culture. They also argue that the constitution and its application is the appeasement of Muslim minorities for vote bank purposes that has been done by the Congress Party.

The constitution was the out-

come of the values which emerged during the freedom movement. The understanding of civilisation is very different for those who participated in the freedom movement, those who stand for its ideology and those who kept aloof from the anti-colonial movement and bowed to the British rulers. While the freedom movement saw India as a plural nation with rich diversities, those who stood aloof saw the civilisation as Hindu civilisation. For them pluralism is a diversion and imposition by the western educated modern leaders.

Even the RSS combine forgets that what they call as Hindu civilisation is undermining the contributions of Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism to this great Indian civilisation. Even the interpretation of Lord Ram, their major icon, is so diverse for Kabir, who saw the Lord as Universal spirit, for Gandhi who saw Him as protector of all the people irrespective of their religion in his famous: Ishawar Allah Tero Naam (Allah and Iswar are same). Jawaharlal Nehru saw

India, Bharat Mata, in 'The Discovery of India', as an "ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously." With great pride he recalled the rule of Emperor Ashok, who in many edicts itched on stones talked of equal treatment for Vedic Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Ajivikas.

This is the core difference between RSS combine and its ideologues that see India as exclusively Brahmanical Hindu and those like Gandhi and Nehru as a country belonging to all the people. Indian Constituent Assembly mainly represented the stream which struggled against the British, the national stream, while RSS was a marginal stream sticking to 'India as Brahmanical Hindu nation'.

PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 1998 formed Venkatchaliah Commission to review the constitution. Dr KR Narayanan, the then President of India aptly remarked "it is not that Constitution that has failed us; it is we who have failed the constitution!"

Commenting on the current state of Affairs Justice Aspi Chinoy made a very apt comment. He said, "The

BJP being the government at the Centre and having an absolute and overwhelming majority in Parliament, sees no need to alter the de jure status of India as a secular country and constitution. Being in control of the *state* and its diverse instrumen-

talities it has been able to achieve its goal of undermining India's secular constitution and introduce a hindutva based ethnocracy, even without amending and altering the de jure secular status". □□

[Contributed by Ram Puniyani]

## NOTE

### Banning Beef

*Shakeel Sobhan writes:*

**F**ROM ASSAM TO KERALA, India's beef bans expose deep cultural, religious and political divides. At present, 20 out of India's 28 states have various laws regulating cow slaughter, including prohibitions on the slaughter or sale of cow.

In 2021, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in Assam had already banned the sale of beef and beef products in areas predominantly inhabited by non-beef-eating communities or near temples.

In India, beef is a contentious subject because cows are sacred to the majority Hindus.

Yet, at the same time, it is a part of the diets of Muslims, Christians, some Indigenous communities, and Dalits, a historically marginalised group from the lowest level of India's centuries-old discriminatory caste hierarchy.

Regionally, beef consumption is negligible in northern and central India, while it is culturally ingrained in states like Kerala and Goa, and much of the northeastern region.

India's beef bans have been a polarising issue—intersecting religion with culture, and politics.

The recent ban in Assam, framed as part of a larger narrative of cow protection, has reignited debates on the implications of such laws on India's multicultural identity, freedom of choice and economy.

Beyond its cultural symbolism, beef bans have been weaponised in

political contexts, with deadly violence following them as self-styled cow vigilantes seek to enforce these bans.

Aparna Parikh, assistant professor of Asian Studies at Penn State University, has researched India's contemporary beef ban and ensuing violence. A ban on beef in India is deeply tied to its cultural and historical context, where reverence for cows and avoiding beef are "central to a Hindu identity, more specifically an upper-caste Hindu identity".

Beef bans, therefore, reflect the prioritisation of one religious group's preferences over others, often justifying violence against communities that are viewed as consuming beef.

"The ban is not entirely new but has taken on new forms and become much more visible, and weaponised against minority groups in the last few years."

But the ruling BJP has taken a selective stance on beef bans.

While the party has introduced stringent bans in several states, particularly in northern and central India, it has adopted a more tolerant approach in Goa and some northeastern states, such as Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Tripura.

"In the northeast, efforts focus on persuading tribal populations, including Christian converts, to reconnect with their 'original' Hindu roots."

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"As part of this strategy, they take a cautious approach in regions like the northeastern states, Goa, and Kerala, where Hindu nationalist rhetoric around food or beef bans could alienate local populations. In these areas, a more calculated and less confrontational approach is adopted to avoid clashing with local sentiments."

For one thing in Assam; there is a noticeable shift toward a harder line, prioritising ideological assertion over regional sensitivities.

However, resistance even from within the BJP against the latest Assam beef ban highlights the polarising nature of the issue. □□

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 HUMRA QURAIISHI'S COLUMN
 

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## Attacks on Christians

*Humra Quraishi*

**V**IOLENCE DOESN'T SEEM halting. Whether here or there. Brutality seems on and ongoing. Where we heading... when heat speeches and targeted attacks are ongoing? Not sure how the Palestinian Christians could even observe Christmas amidst all the destruction and deaths. No halting of killings there. Just too painfully shocking!

Focusing on the situation here, earlier this week there came up news reports of the targeted hounding of the Christians, in and around Christmas. Jesuit priest Father Cedric Prakash sent this report highlighting the incidents of violence against the Christian community in our country. To quote from it: "Presently, January 2024 to November 2024, India has recorded 745 incidents of Christian citizens being attacked for their faith... the Manipur riots witnessed the destruction of over 200 churches and countless lives lost. These incidents of anti-Christian violence have been linked to Hindu nationalist groups, which have been accused of receiving support from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)."

This detailed report also focuses on the facts and figures to the attacks in the recent years:"According to the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI), there were 327 incidents of violence against Christians in 2021 alone. In 2022, over 300 attacks against Christians were reported across the country, with many incidents going unreported. The United Christian Forum (UCF) reported 486 incidents of anti-Christian violence in 2022, including 115 incidents of physical violence and 357 incidents of intimidation and harassment.

The UCF monitored trend listed

127 incidents in the year 2014, when the Modi government took over power... Churches and Christian institutions have been specifically targeted in many incidents. In 2021, at least 15 churches were vandalized or set on fire across India.

In 2021, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) placed India on its "Countries of Particular Concern" list, citing the country's "systematic, ongoing, and egregious" persecution of religious minorities. Simultaneously, 13 state governments have now enacted anti-conversion bills, which are being blatantly abused to wreak havoc on the lives of Christian citizens."

### **SHABNAM MAKES A DIFFERENCE!**

Shabnam Hashmi is one such individual who has been reaching out to fellow citizens, trying to make them financially and socially strong and secure. She set up ANHAD (Act Now for Harmony and Democracy) in 2003 to work as a forum or platform or base to reach out to hundreds amongst us... In the last two years Shabnam has been trying to empower women in rural Kashmir. She and her team have been working tirelessly to teach women in remote villages in Kupwara, the art of crewel embroidery To quote her: "We began this journey two years ago, driven by our passion to empower rural women. We started production only three months ago. Our products may not be very cheap, but they are priced to ensure that our artisans receive fair compensation and that we can sustain this initiative."

She details, "The process is pains-

takingly slow. Our volunteers make multiple trips from our centre to Srinagar. What had got Shabnam close to the Kashmir region and its people? "Our Anhad volunteers arrived in Kashmir immediately after the October 2005 earthquake. We went to Tangdar and visited and distributed relief material in 15 villages: Amroi, Tad, Hajitra, Dhanni, Gabra, Gundi Gujra, Dhringla, Gabdori, Nyay Gabra, Kundla, Madanpura, Haftana Gabra, Khawaspara, Badwanj, Bakhaiyan Malda. Only army had reached the villages apart from Anhad.

Anhad started a Community Centre in Khumriyal in November 2022. The centre actively engages with the youth, women and children of Khumriyal and about fifteen surrounding villages. Shabnam details that the Community Centre has a library with over 800 books. The library is open to the public and functions all through... The library has a collection of books for competitive exams like UPSC, JKPS and NEET as well as books for primary, secondary class students. It has a good collection of fiction, reference books, literature for children. Students can read the books in the study room or they can also borrow the books from the library for home. Students get a peaceful and noise free environment for studying. Library space also serves as a meeting room for the community meetings, discussions, and poetry sessions once or twice a month.... They also run a six months Diploma in Computer Applications and also Six months Diploma in Tailoring, Cutting and Machine knitting... Then there are several outreach programmes too, for women and the youth and children of the region.

This writer was pleasantly surprised to know that the national campaign, #MereGharAaKeToDekh



(Visit My Home, Be My Guest) that was launched last year ((2023) on August 15 across 27 states. It was initiated by Anhad and was joined by approximately 100 organisations across India. As part of the campaign Anhad invited people from across India to visit Lolab Valley,

Kupwara and live in rural Kashmiri homes from 13-17 October, 2023... Shabnam details, "The visitors were from Pune, Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, Kochi, Mewat, Ahmedabad, Guwahati, Kutch and Varanasi and included people from the field of management, hospitality profession-

als, entrepreneurs, physicians, psychologists, lawyers, gender experts, teachers, artists and activists who were hosted in different villages. This programme helped in eliminating the pre-conceived notions about each other." □□□

26-12-2024

## A PIONEER

# Suniti Kumar Ghosh: His Contributions to Indian Historical Studies—II

*Amit Bhattacharyya*

**W**HAT WAS GANDHI'S Real Plan?

Now there was an added fire in the statements and speeches of Gandhi, Patel and Prasad. At a press meet dated 14 July Gandhi declared that "This is an open rebellion of a non-violent character" and stressed "that there is no room for negotiations in the proposal for withdrawal". He told the press that he would not court imprisonment, Courting imprisonment "is too soft a thing". "If dragged into jail", he could fast. His intention was "to make the thing as short as possible". He said that "free India will make common cause with the Allies". But he was not sure whether free India would take part in militarism or choose to go the non-violent way". He declared that it would be his "biggest movement". (CWG, LXXVI, 294-7, 298-9, 303, emphasis added cited in Ghosh, p.224-25).

Patel's speeches too, Ghosh as points out, were breathing fire. At different public meetings in Gujarat and Bombay, he declaimed that it was *Gandhi's last struggle and it would be "short and swift"*. (Shankardass, Vallabhabhai Patel, 244; see also Prasad, *Autobiography*, 532).

In the new situation, as S.K. Ghosh writes, "they were not squeamish about violence. Gandhi came

to regard the cutting of telegraph and telephone wires and removing rails or fishplates as non-violent if the motives were not to injure *innocent people* (*Ibid*, 535-6, emphasis added). Congress president Azad impressed on prominent Congressmen from different parts of the country that, if the Government put behind bars the Congress leaders, "the people would be free to adopt any method, violent or non-violence, to oppose the violence of the Government in every possible way". (Azad, *op.cit*, 81, emphasis added, cited in Ghosh, p.225). At a press conference at Ahmedabad on 28 July, Patel said:

"All the struggles launched by the Congress so far, were of a restricted character. This time the movement would be unrestricted... Civil war and anarchy may occur during the struggle but the movement will not be stopped for it".

Ghosh observes that this then became the refrain of the speeches and statements of the Congress leaders. *Formally wedded to non-violence, the leaders did not rule out violence* (*Ibid*, p.225).

The AICC met at Bombay on 7 and 8 August and adopted a resolution demanding that Britain should quit India.

The pertinent question is: Did Gandhi and his associates really seek a confrontation with the British imperialists to achieve independence? Or, was Gandhi's 'Quit India' a threat which would suffice to frighten the British imperialists and the United Nations on the eve of the anticipated Japanese invasion to come to a settlement with them?

Ghosh argues: "If the Congress leaders were really serious about a struggle, it is difficult to explain why no concrete programme of action was placed before the people, who were asked to 'do or die'?(p.226). As Nehru wrote: "There was no direction, no programme". "So neither he [Gandhi] nor the Congress Working Committee", as Nehru points out, "issued any kind of directions, public or private, except that people should be prepared for all developments, and should in any event adhere to the policy of peaceful and non-violent action"(FICCI, *Correspondence and Relevant Documents relating to Important Questions Dealt with by the Federation during the year 1943-44*, New Delhi, 1944, pp.110, 245-6 cited in Ghosh, p.226). They also made "no arrangements for the functioning of the Congress after they had been removed from the scene". S. Gopal hits the nail on its head by pointing out that "it was almost as if the Working Committee wished to escape to prison and to avoid decision..." (S. Gopal, *op.cit*, cited in Ghosh, *ibid*.)

Ghosh asks, "Did Gandhi and his associates expect that the unorganized, disunited and unarmed masses

without any central leadership to guide them would be able to win in a struggle with the armed forces of the Allied powers and liberate themselves"? What was the situation? As Ghosh reminds us, the Muslims were mostly hostile. Jinnah issued a statement that the CWC's resolution of 14 July was intended to blackmail the British and force them to fulfil the congress objective of establishing a "Hindu raj", "thereby throwing the Muslims and other minorities and interests at the mercy of the Congress raj" (CWG, LXXVI, p.368, fn.2). The CPI. Which had some hold on the working class in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Kanpur, etc. had declared that the imperialist war had changed into a world-wide anti-fascist was and that it was the task of the Indian people to support the Allies and not to take any step that would weaken the defence against Japan. Even the Congress leadership itself was disunited.

Commenting on the Congress leaders' refusal to place any programme of action, D.D. Kosambi, has said that though they knew that arrest was imminent and though most of them "had prepared for the event by setting their family affairs and personal finances in excellent order", not one of them "ever thought of a plan of action for the Congress as a whole". What does this refusal to draw up a plan of action signify? Kosambi sums it up in his own brilliant way stating that this refusal "was quite brilliant, no matter how futile it may have seemed on a

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national revolutionary scale... If the British won the war it was quite clear that not favoured Japan; if on the other hand (and they had only to attack immediately in force for the whole of the defence system to crumble) they could certainly not accuse the congress of having helped the British" (D.D. Kosambi, *Exasperating Essays*, pp.16-17).

The reality is that though Gandhi had been declaring that that it was an "open rebellion", that there was "no room left for negotiations", "no question of last chance", he actually left the field open for negotiations. Instead, on 15 July, the day after the Working Committee adopted a "Quit India" resolution, he, as Ghosh points out, sent his disciple Mira Behn (daughter of a former British Admiral), to see that Viceroy, the Commander-in-Chief and General Harley (TOP, II, pp.407-08; Mahadev Desai to Amrit Kaur, 15 July 1942, *Wikenden Report*, p.236). The Viceroy refused to see her since Gandhi was talking of an open rebellion. Gandhi's emissary assured Laithwaite, Viceroy's private secretary, that Gandhi "would do all he could to guide the movement on non-violent lines" (Ghosh, *India and the Raj*, p.229). However, the British government refused to entertain the Congress claim.

On receiving Mira Behn's report, Gandhi's secretary Desai issued what has been described as "a most significant statement". It said "that there appeared to be some misunderstanding about Gandhi's intentions" and that "it was not correct to say that Gandhiji had decided to launch an open non-violent rebellion against the British" (Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, Madras 1988, p.81).

Although Gandhi preferred to play for time, the Viceroy and his Council refused to wait. Gandhi and almost all members of the Working

Committee and other prominent Congressmen were put under arrest in the early hours of August.

Immediately after arrest, Gandhi, as Ghosh observed, "became a sadder and wiser man" (*Ibid*, p.231). That morning Azad found him "looking very depressed". Azad observed: "I have never seen him looking so dejected... Now that his calculations had proved wrong, he was uncertain as to what he should do". (Azad, *op.cit.*, p.85).

However, as a BBC official remarked: "The arrest of the leaders had the usual effect of enshrining them once again as national heroes".

### **The Quit India Struggle**

The 'Quit India' struggle was described by Lynlithgow in a cable to Prime Minister Winston Churchill as by far the most serious rebellion since that of 1857, the gravity and extent of which we have so far concealed from the world for reasons of military security" (TOP, II, p.853). There is a detailed description of it in the book.

S.K. Ghosh observed: "It was a rebellion of the people, mainly a peasant revolt in which leaders had no role to play for some time except that they had popularized a slogan—'Quit India'—coined by an American journalist. After some time they played a negative role; they did whatever they could to liquidate it".

When the Congress leaders took refuge in the Aga Khan Palace or prisons and other Congressmen were arrested and their organization was banned, students on strike, people observed hartals, held meetings and demonstrations and took out processions defying government orders almost all over India. They tried to hoist Congress flags atop government buildings and there were clashes everywhere between the demonstrators and police leading to deaths in many areas.

The most common forms of struggle were attacks on centres of British power like police stations and treasuries and on means of communications such as railway stations and post offices and cutting of telegraph and telephone wires—all intended to paralyze the government. There were pitched battles in many places. The railways most affected were East Indian, Bengal, North-Western, Madras and South Marhatta. There was hardly any non-rent or no revenue movement. It was an entirely new leadership thrown up by struggles and mostly unknown before. Students, Forward Bloc, CSP activists and Kisan Sabha workers in some places played an active part.

The AICC members, Congress Socialists, Gandhians and others who escaped arrest, formed a central organizing body and tried to function in the name of the Congress. It drew up a programme of action which endorsed violent attacks on symbols of government authority, sabotage and capture of power. When early in 1943, Gandhi condemned violence and sabotage activities, there was a split in the body. Sucheta Kripalini and other Gandhians, withdrew from the body.

Of the battles that took place in urban areas, Patna's reached a great intensity. When a big procession of students on 11 August was fired upon by the police and seven students were killed and many wounded, there was a revolt of the people. Next day, there was no trace of British rule. Urban proletarians replaced students as leaders of the revolt. Similar developments took place also in Chimur, Bombay, Pune, Ahmedabad, Ballia, Calcutta and Balurghat.

The struggle became more intense in a number of rural areas. In the Balasore district in Orissa, the people revolted against police firing to wipe out the authority of the

government for some time. In the Jeyporeestate (now Koraput), and Talchar, firings and even machine-gunning from the air were resorted to put down the revolts. In the Madras Presidency, several police stations were destroyed. A parallel government led by the Congress socialists functioned for some months in Ahmedabad, drawing its support from the Hindu middle classes of the city (Ghosh, II, pp. 232-34).

Medinipur in South-West Bengal with its long tradition of militant anti-imperialist struggle of the peasants and of the national revolutionaries was one of the few places in India where the people suffered the cruelest oppression by the government as also by Nature.

Even before the 'Quit India' call, the people of Medinipur (especially of the Tamluk and Kanthi sub-divisions) launched struggles against the government's 'denial policy', procurement and removal of rice and paddy from the district.

The Congress committees in Kanthi and Tamluk were reorganized, ridding themselves of those who strictly adhered to non-violence, and set up War Councils with Forward Bloc and other Congress representatives. Training camps for volunteers were set up in Tamluk sub-division and a *Mukti Bahini* (Liberation Army) and a *Bhagini Sena* (Army of Sisters) were organized. Important roads were dug up at places, culverts were blown up, telegraph and telephone lines were cut off and poles uprooted on the night of 28 September by thousands of villagers according to plan in the Tamluk sub-division. Next day began mass attacks on police stations for the capture of the entire area.

While leading a large contingent for the capture of the police headquarters at Tamluk, Matangini-Hazra, an intrepid lady of 73, fell down along with nine others to police

bullets (*Freedom Struggle in Tamluk I: Sarbadhinayak*, 26-28, cited in Ghosh, *ibid*, p.235). Several police stations were captured. British Indian troops were rushed in, assisted by aeroplanes, ready to drop bombs, but the people fought on.

No doubt, it was a real people's war. Except most Muslims and a few communists, the entire people including Krishak Samiti activists supported the struggle. Parallel administrations were set up. To crush this struggle, the army and the police set new records in savagery: "it was a tale of mass arrests, killing, destruction of homes, raping, even gang-raping, of women, as well as of heroic resistance" (Ghosh, *ibid*, p.235).

To make the situation worse, a fierce, a fierce cyclone swept over Kanthi and Tamluk on the night of 16-17 October leaving a train of devastation. Tens of thousands perished; there was neither food nor drinking water for the survivors; and epidemics followed. The news was censored and not allowed to reach the outside world. And when the people suffered from the ravages of the cyclone, the raids by the combined forces continued. There was a setback in Kanthi after December 1942.

The *Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar* (National Government of Tamluk) was

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set up on 17 December to resist the marauders including decoits, arrange for relief and rehabilitation of cyclone-affected people, preserve law and order and administer justice. *Biplabi*, a journal they had been bringing out, became the organ of the *Jatiya Sarkar*.

The *Jatiya Sarkar* decided to eliminate local informers. It had to fight the alien government as well as local landlords, the rich landowners and unscrupulous merchants whom they had to force to unearth their hoarded stocks of food and whose profiteering at the cost of the lives of the people they had to curb. The requisitioned stocks were distributed among the people and the consumption per capita was rationed. As expected, their actions came to be openly condemned by the 'votaries of non-violence'. Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal observed:

"As a matter of fact, the Quit

India Movement of Tamluk and Kanthi had outgrown the Congress and for that matter all other political parties. The veterans of the past *satyagrahas* had submitted to the newly emerging forces which represented the mood and aspirations of the common people" (Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal, 'The Quit India Movement in Medinipur District' in G. Pandey, *The Indian Nation in 1942*, p.68, cited in Ghosh, *ibid*).

Despite utmost efforts, the British rulers could not crush the people's war. The person who came to their rescue was, as many times before, the 'apostle of non-violence' himself. S.K. Ghosh observes: But the rebellion that the forces of the alien raj could not defeat, was killed by Gandhi's injunctions about non-violence and denunciations of secrecy and sabotage activities". He personally toured the area and at the end

of August 1944, the leaders of the struggle decided to call it off from 1 September, disband the *Jatiya Sarkar* and the militia and suspend the publication of *Biplabi* (Ghosh, p.236).

Anti-colonial movements of similar nature, but not of the same magnitude took place also in Rampurhat of Birbhum, West Bengal, Satara, East Khandesh, Pune, Kolaba, Broach, Belgaum and Surat in Maharashtra.

The Quit India revolt, mainly a peasant rebellion in widely scattered places, revealed the potentialities of the Indian people. As Ghosh points out, "it showed that the main force of an anti-imperialist democratic revolution in a country like India is the peasantry. What ensured its defeat was the lack of a revolutionary theory and a well-knit organization" (*Ibid*, pp.237-38). □□□

[To be concluded]

## SOCIAL REFORM AND POLITICAL REFORM

### Who is afraid of Ambedkar?

**Ashok Nag**

*Every storm runs out of rain eventually—Maya Angelou*

A STORM HAS ERUPTED across the streets of India following an invoking of the name of Babasaheb Ambedkar in a derogatory manner by the Home Minister. This happened when a discussion was going on in Rajya Sabha to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Indian Constitution. Babasaheb, to recall, was the chairman of the drafting committee of the independent India's constitution. No doubt, this storm will also pass. However, the idea and vision of Babasaheb will remain unread, gathering dust in the library of the parliament. Ironically, both the ruling party and the opposition are earnestly praising a man by attributing to him ideas and beliefs that stand

diametrically opposed to those of the Babasaheb who aspired to create a truly democratic and secular India after colonial rule.

To understand what Babasaheb Ambedkar stood for, one needs to read a definitive exposition of his thoughts in the text of the speech he composed but could not deliver. In December 1935, the "*Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal*" (translated as the Society for the Breakup of the Caste System), a reformist organisation in Lahore, invited Babasaheb to deliver a speech on the Indian caste system at their annual conference scheduled for January 1936 in Lahore. After he shared the first draft of the speech (Ambedkar 1935) with the conference organisers, a

difference of opinion arose over certain views expressed in that draft. Since neither the author nor the organisers were willing to compromise on their positions, Babasaheb withdrew the speech. The title of the speech was "Annihilation of Caste", and ironically, the inviting organisation, while opposed to the caste system, advocated for breaking the barriers between castes rather than its complete annihilation, a goal for which Babasaheb was fighting. To understand the intellectual underpinnings of this dispute and the current controversy, one must recognise the critical difference between these two views.

#### **Why social reform is necessary for political reform?**

##### **(Section 2 of the speech)**

Babasaheb Ambedkar was clear about the pre-eminence of social reform over political reform. By "social reform" he meant elimination of "mischief wrought by evil customs"



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prevailing in the Hindu society which was not “in a state of efficiency”, and “ceaseless efforts must be made to eradicate these evils”. The goal of political reform is to eradicate “the weak points in the political organisation in the country”. Babasaheb was of the opinion that without the prior occurrence of social reform, political reform would be a non sequitur, rendering it of no value to the people of the country. He pointed out that two organisations, namely National Congress and Social Conference, were twins at their birth—the first one to spearhead political reform while the other one to social reform. However, “in the course of time the party in favour of political reform won, and the Social Conference vanished and was forgotten.” For Babasaheb, it was a conscious move by Hindu liberals. To underscore this point, he highlighted the following lines from a speech delivered by the president of the National Congress at its eighth session held in Allahabad in 1892:

“I for one have no patience with those who say we shall not be fit for political reform until we reform our social system. I fail to see any connection between the two. Are we not fit (for political reform) because our widows remain unmarried and our girls are given in marriage earlier than in other countries? Because our wives and daughters do not drive about with us visiting our friends? Because we do not send our daughters to Oxford and Cambridge? (Cheers [from the audience])”.

To reinforce and hammer away his contention that without social reform, political reform would provide no succor to the people who have been treated as animals for millennia, Babasaheb referred to a variety of facts about the inhuman treatment that the untouchables of Hindu society receive from the upper caste

people. He emphasised that by social reform, he does not mean the reform of the ‘Hindu family’, like abolition of child marriage, allowing widow marriage etc. He was seeking the reform of the fundamental architecture of the Hindu society- that is abolition of the Caste System.

**Why social reform is necessary for economic reform (section 3 of the speech)**

In this section, Babasaheb argues that even a socialist revolution in India would fail without effecting social reform prior to it. To prove his point that political policymaking can have “value and permanence” if and only if it is in conformity with existing social practice within a society, he referred to many such instances from the history. However, more importantly, he referred to the “Communal Award” which was created on 16 August 1932 by the British government of India, to extend separate electorate to Depressed Classes (called Scheduled classes in Independent India) and other minorities. This shows that the British Government understood that without this limited social reform, even a small political reform would be a non-starter. Although Mahatma Gandhi and National Congress were vehemently opposed to eking out a separate electorate from Hindu community, Babasaheb welcomed heartily this policy of the British government of India. It is worthwhile to quote what Mahatma Gandhi wrote about this British policy.

*They do not realise that the separate electorate will create division among Hindus so much so that it will lead to bloodshed. Untouchable hooligans will make common cause with Muslim hooligans and kill caste Hindus. Has the British Government no idea of all this? I do not think so.* (Duncan Ira, 2022, also see Helen M. Nugent (1979))

Babasaheb was unconcerned

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about the merits or demerits of socialism because his entire life was singularly focused on eradicating the most inhuman evil of Hindu society—caste. To quote him— “This is only another way of saying that, turn in any direction you like, Caste is the monster that crosses your path. You cannot have political reform; you cannot have economic reform, unless you kill this monster.”

It is more than evident that Dr Ambedkar’s view about the fundamental and unchangeable social hierarchy of the Hindu society was widely different from the views of the Congress leadership. Despite this, he agreed to be the one of the main architect of the independent India’s constitution because the Congress leadership agreed to provide a separate electorate for Scheduled Castes and Tribes. In other words, as a pragmatic leader, he believed that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. This act of him does not imply that he had given up his lifelong struggle for annihilation of caste.

***Caste is not just a division of labour; it is a division of labourers (section 4 of the speech)***

Apologists of the caste system argue that it should be viewed, ignoring its etymological past, as another name for the modern division of labour, which is an integral part of any industrial society. Babasaheb, while accepting the division of labour as one of the attribute of the caste system, points out that the caste system of the Hindu society also determines an hierarchy in that division of labour, condemning those at the bottom as not worthy to be treated as an independent human being. The division of labour based on skill, dexterity, and judgment does not, in principle, determine the purported division at the time of a person’s birth. This sui generis division of labour is essentially a division of labourers, argues Babasaheb.

The age old Indian division of labour based on caste system has thus led to “*subordination of man’s natural powers and inclinations to the exigencies of social rules.*”

***Caste cannot preserve a nonexistent “racial purity” (section 5)***

In today’s world the “racial purity” is just a fantasy; harboured by many but followed by none. Maintenance of “racial purity” could have been a motivation for the authors of *Manusmriti*, but to hallucinate it today is a non-sequitur. In this regard, one may look at the statement issued by the American Association of Physical Anthropologists in the year 2019. “Pure races, in the sense of genetically homogenous populations, do not exist in the human species today, nor is there any evidence that they have ever existed in the past.” . In view of this declaration, one cannot but agree with Babasaheb’s view about the claim of racial purity for themselves by the upper caste Hindus: “[the caste system] embodies the arrogance and selfishness of a perverse section of the Hindus who were superior enough in social status to set it in fashion, and who had the authority to force it on their inferiors.” (Last Para)

***Caste prevents Hindus from forming a real society or nation (section 6)***

As a critique of Hinduism, Babasaheb has no equal so far. His criticism is not merely a scholarly investigation into a social construct, unwrapping of interplay of power, property and social status, layer by layer. Rather, it is the result of felt agony of being an untouchable in a highly fractured and rigidly hierarchical society. Nevertheless, he actively participated in the nation building effort of independent India by providing his deep knowledge about Indian society, modern jurisprudence and structure of governance in ad-

vanced countries. Therefore, the point arises, why he should be so skeptical about the possibility of independent India becoming a modern nation without any spec of ignominy of untouchability for any section of the society. In this regard, the following quote, a lengthy one, is good enough to understand the rationale behind his views.

*‘In every Hindu the consciousness that exists is the consciousness of his caste. That is the reason why the Hindus cannot be said to form a society or a nation.*

*Men do not become a society by living in physical proximity, any more than a man ceases to be a member of his society by living so many miles away from other men*

*The similarity in habits and customs, beliefs and thoughts, is not enough to constitute men into society*

*Men constitute a society because they have things which they possess in common. Parallel activity, even if similar, is not sufficient to bind men into a society*

*The Caste System prevents common activity; and by preventing common activity, it has prevented the Hindus from becoming a society with a unified life and a consciousness of its own being’.*

This is a very radical view about what constitutes a society or a nation. If one considers all the above points with regard to a country like USA, it would have failed to qualify as a nation until mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The Rosa Park event happened on December 1, 1955 at the capital of Alabama. City busses in that city followed the law of segregation- the front seats for whites and the rest for blacks. Ms Park, after a busy day boarded a city bus and sat in the middle, just behind the front “white”

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section. When incoming passengers filled up the front white section, the bus driver ordered the black passengers in the middle row to vacate the seats and stand. Rosa Park refused. She was arrested and convicted for defying the segregation law. It is a different matter that this event led to quashing of segregation law.

It may not be out of place to recall the "I have a dream" speech of Martin Luther King that he delivered on the steps of Lincoln Memorial of Washington DC on August 23, 1963. To recall, around 100 years back, the US president Abraham Lincoln had signed the Emancipation Proclamation freeing the slaves.

*I have a dream today.*

*I have a dream that one day down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification; that one day right down in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed. We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal.'*

By Babasaheb's yardstick, USA could not be called a nation.

In fact, inequality is all pervasive. The only difference between India and USA is that the dominant religion in USA does not discriminate between white and black people, per se. No Church would disallow a black to pray in its sanctuary. However, an untouchable is routinely denied entry into the sanctuary of many famous Hindu temple- called *Garbhagriha*.

Although majority of Indians are Hindu and Hindus by themselves do not form a society for reasons enu-

merated by Babasaheb Ambedkar in this section of his speech. But for that reason India does not cease to be a nation. However, Babasaheb Ambedkar's argument will become valid, if India ceases to be a secular country and Indian Constitution is amended to declare it as Hindu Rashtra.

***The worst feature of the Caste System is an anti-social spirit (section 7)***

The anti-social spirit is a phenomenon that cuts across castes, religions and languages. In every nation or society, it would be difficult not to find a small community or a group that live at the margin of the society and called anti-social. Babasaheb himself has written this in the second para of this section: "This anti-social spirit, this spirit of protecting its own interests, is as much a marked feature of the different castes in their isolation from one another as it is of nations in their isolation."

Similarly, the British Government of India enacted Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) 1871 to notify certain tribes as criminal and kept them under continuous surveillance, thus labeling about 200 communities in several provinces "criminal" communities under this act (Devy 2013 Ram Singh).

In Great Britain, a large survey of ethnic minority groups was carried out in 2021. According to a Guardian report the survey has revealed that ethnic minorities Roma, Gypsy and Traveller face extremely high levels of racial assault, poor health, precarious employment and socioeconomic deprivation. The research found that 62% of Gypsy or Traveller people had experienced a racial assault. In other words, although anti-social spirit is present in all nations, Indian system of caste may make it more pervasive (see the link in reference section below).

***Caste prevents the uplift and incorporation of the aboriginal tribes (section 8)***

This section essentially repeats section 7; with the only difference being that it focuses on aboriginal tribes, referred to as 'scheduled tribes' in the Indian Constitution. He criticises the Hindu society for ignoring 13 million people still "living in the midst of civilisation ... in a "savage state". The reason for this apathy of a Hindu towards anyone born outside the caste system is that Hindus are more concerned about protecting the purity of his or her caste. Unlike a Christian missionary, Hindu priests rarely engage themselves in proselytisation, as it would be difficult to assign any particular caste to the converted person because caste is determined at birth only. That is why; a number Hindu groups are against worshipping Sai Baba, because he was born a Muslim.

***Remaining sections:***

The higher castes have conspired to keep the lower castes down (section 9)

Caste prevents Hinduism from being a missionary religion (section 10)

Caste deprives Hindus of mutual help, trust, and fellow-feeling (11)

Caste is a powerful weapon for preventing all reform (section 12)

Caste destroys public spirit, public opinion, and public charity (section 13)

It is better to address all five sections in one go because they are interrelated and repetitive, highlighting one of the most important shortcomings of Hinduism: its rigidity and the consequent barrier to conversion from other faiths to Hinduism. Dr Ambedkar views Hinduism as a constellation of castes, where internal unity is highly fragile and contingent upon any dire external threat. This exclusivity of Hinduism is not only directed at non-Hindus but also manifests within its own people by

creating an insurmountable hierarchy of status, privileges, occupation, and socialisation among believers.

The following quotes from Dr Ambedkar's un-delivered lecture proves the point.

*The Hindus criticise the Moham-medans for having spread their religion by the use of the sword. [But] Hindu would not spread the light,... would endeavour to keep others in darkness, [and], would not consent to share his intellectual and social inheritance” with others who are ready to consider conversion to Hinduism. I have no hesitation in saying that if the Mohammedan has been cruel, the Hindu has been mean; and meanness is worse than cruelty.* (Last para of section 9)

*Hindu Society being a collection of castes and each caste being a closed corporation, there is no place for a convert* (Last para of section 10)

*With the Hindu Gods all-forbearing, it is not difficult to imagine the pitiable condition of the wronged and the oppressed among the Hindus. Indifferentism is the worst kind of disease that can infect a people. Why is the Hindu so indifferent? In my opinion this indifferentism is the result of the Caste System, which has made Sanghatan and co-operation even for a good cause impossible.*(Last para of section 11)

*Caste in the hands of the orthodox has been a powerful weapon for persecuting the reformers and for killing all reform.* (Last line of section 12)

*The capacity to appreciate merits in a man, apart from his caste, does not exist in a Hindu. There is appreciation of virtue, but only when the man is a fellow caste-man. The whole morality is as bad as tribal morality.* (Last para of section 13)

In truth the above summary of the five paragraphs faithfully presents the views of the respected

doctor. Despite having experienced inhuman treatment at the hands of upper-caste Hindus, Babasaheb, setting aside his personal rancor, has provided a succinct and accurate description of the caste system in Hinduism. However, criticism is a lazy exercise for any great thinker of the stature of Babasaheb. People would like to know: What is the road ahead? Will it be possible to annihilate the caste system in Hindu society within the next hundred years?

In this respect, Babasaheb has only left for his followers only a dream—a dream similar to the one Martin Luther King articulated in 1963. King's dream has largely remained unfulfilled, and fate has so far played the same game with Babasaheb. In this speech, Babasaheb outlines his vision for a society based on liberty, equality, and fraternity. The great French revolutionary Robespierre suggested that these words be inscribed on the flags of France in 1790. They were denied, and after a few failed efforts, they were incorporated into the French Constitution of 1948.

After spelling out his ideal, in the next 11 sections of the speech, Dr Ambedkar gave detailed reasons for the impossibility of Hindu society accepting and implementing his ideals. So far, efforts to bring reform from within the Hindu society, keeping the caste system intact, with some marginal tweaking, has failed as it was inevitable given the basic structure of Hindu religion. In this respect, Babasaheb was right. In the last section, he expressed his frustration through the title of the section itself—*The struggle is yours; I have now decided to leave the Hindu fold.*

Babasaheb wrote this speech in December 1935 and Dr Ambedkar adopted Buddhism on October 14, 1956. It took him two decades to take the plunge because he could not or did not want to be a Godless

person. To be an atheist and leader of any community in India, even if that community is untouchable to its other communities worshipping the same God, is next to impossible. This is the same reason for accepting a key position in the committee for drafting of the Indian constitution. He did not want to give any leeway to other members of drafting committee to incorporate Hinduism in that precious document. In this respect at least, he had Pandit Nehru as a co-believer. It was Pandit Nehru's masterstroke to bring in the Doctor as the head of the drafting committee. Otherwise, there was a possibility that Mahatma Gandhi's view about the eternal sanctity of Hindu Dharma could have found place in the constitution.

When Babasaheb took upon himself to publish his speech, Mahatma Gandhi entered into a debate with the doctor by pointing out fallacies in Babasheeb's train of argument. A perusal of text of that debate clearly shows that there was no meeting ground between the two.

The article so far has pointed out the deep divergence between the understanding of Congress about Hindu Dharma and that of Babasaheb. What about BJP's view on this subject? One can only say that Babasaheb Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar must be laughing in the heaven, subject to its existence, if BJP is ready to chant his name in praise. Maybe, the sun has started rising in the west.

Finally, one must accept that an overwhelming majority of Indian people are deeply religious, and very few are willing to renounce their ancestral religion. At the same time, a significant section of Hindus is not ready to follow all dictates of the Shastras or Manusmriti and would actively support any effort towards the annihilation of caste. People must find a middle path to gradually break



the stranglehold of Brahmins and high-caste people on the practice of Hindu religion. A list of low-hanging fruits is given below.

1. For any government document, the caste title like Sharma, Bhat, Upadhyay, Chatterjee, Iyer, Shastri, Chattopadhyay, Bagchi, Pandit etc. will be forbidden. Mother's given name should follow every person's given name and nothing more. Father's name must not be part of this naming convention.
2. This naming convention would apply to all government documents including property registration document, birth certificate, passport etc.
3. UPSC should prepare a list of

qualified priests, based on open examination. All temples must select priests from this list. People should consider Priesthood as any other job which, requiring specific skill- like knowledge of Satras etc. Every university should have a degree in priesthood also. Implementation of the above list of aspirational activities may not be easy and vehement opposition to its introduction will defiantly break out. However, Rome was not built in one day. □□□

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#### 'LABOUR WITH PHILOSOPHY'

## 'The Shudra Rebellion'

TNM

*[The author explains how Kancha Ilaiah, in his latest book 'The Shudra Rebellion', posits the link with labour of different caste communities as a more credible way of reading caste both in the present and historically.]*

GOING AGAINST THE obvious but misinformed approach of focusing the discourse on caste entirely on either Brahmins or Dalits, Professor Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd brings Shudra castes squarely into the discussion in his recent book 'The Shudra Rebellion'. He reinterprets the historically servile Shudras as the productive communities and civilisational builders.

Often termed an 'internal matter', caste inequalities within the rubric of Hinduism are reduced to a non-issue by those who claim spiritual leadership, and by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Historically, caste has been fought on the grounds of religious freedom, social equality, and human dignity, often involving mass struggles by the oppressed community.

Emerging out of that rebellious tradition, Kancha Ilaiah argues that one cannot envision a post-caste world where the Shudra castes are not involved in a historically-informed and politically-sound churning, as they constitute the majority.

In the past two centuries, social activists, political and spiritual leaders from the untouchables, Shudras, Adivasis, and the missionary community have been analysing the caste system from different vantage points. Ambedkar, Phule, and Periyar, have strongly highlighted the economic cost of caste for the oppressed.

In a significant move, Kancha Ilaiah attempts to integrate into the caste discourse the involvement of different castes in the production process that could make or break a civilisation. In 'The Shudra Rebellion', he posits the link with labour of different caste communities as a

more credible way of reading caste both in the present and historically.

The binary between the spade and the book is central here. The spade represents the collective labour that powers the political economy of a given civilisation. Making obvious the contradiction between Harappan civilisation and the later Aryan wave backed by recent findings by Tony Joseph's *Early Indians*, Kancha Ilaiah argues that the Harappan civilisation's base is spade, representing the labour power that is the preserve of the historical communities of Dalits, Shudras, and Adivasis. In contrast, the Aryan culture, which is said to be the last migration into the subcontinent, centres itself around the Brahminical Sanskrit texts and ritualism, which were mythicised. Kancha Ilaiah questions how a civilisation can establish itself or survive if not for the labour of its members or their participation in the production process.

It needs to be noted here that Kancha Ilaiah has often been criticised for painting historical narratives into grand binary oppositions. The scholarly community is quick to

dismiss his scholarship, merely because they could trace a line of the counterfactual. But when fundamental civilisational truths are at stake, one needs to steer clear of cherry-picking faults, and have to approach the text—or even the author—in a holistic way.

From a structural-historical point of view, the contribution of Dwijas is net *negative* towards civilisational building—they have a parasitic existence in terms of their relationship with productive classes. As per the hegemonic Sanskrit texts, manual labour and agriculture are seen as ‘polluting’ tasks. This enables the Dwijas’ artificial alienation from organic labour and forms the basis for the economic appropriation and exploitation that powers the grand illusion of Hindu spirituality. In fact, spiritual and social hierarchy is powered and rendered legitimate by the economic appropriation inbuilt in the Varna system.

Spirituality is supposed to lead the society to a higher moral state. Trapped within the ego-centric-caste can be seen as the collective ego of a community—power politics of religious Brahmins, the real victims are the Shudras and Dalits who look up to Brahminism for spiritual progress. The economic and socio-psychological cost that the Dalit-Shudra, and recently Adivasis, pay for investing

spiritually in the Aryan culture is debilitating as it offers no spiritual equality. Even to this day, Shudras and Dalits cannot become priests of Brahminical temples, even if they are as qualified as the Brahmin aspirant.

Despite the obvious spiritual inequality, why do masses still identify themselves with the Aryan religious traditions?

To show the deep rootedness of the Shudra slavery, Kancha Ilaiah goes back in history to show that Shudras, even if they were kings, were under the thumb of Brahmins and the literature they have produced. He accuses Shudra kings of “surrender[ing] the written word to the Brahmin”. Educated Shudra rulers such as Shahu Maharaj are seen complaining to the then Governor of Bombay about how deep and widespread the Brahmin monopoly and hegemony were.

A tradition of literary and written records is crucial for a community to evolve its spiritual traditions as it will enable discussions, debate, and continuing presence over centuries, as Kancha Ilaiah has himself noted elsewhere. The unfortunate state of Shudra castes is that, despite owning significant tracts of agricultural lands, they do not possess a written record of the spiritual and productive lives of their ancestors.

The majority of Shudra castes have their own gods such as *Mariamman*, *Berappa Ayyannar* or *Pochamma*. However, these communities are not aware of their traditions older than two or three generations, making it quite easy for RSS-BJP to co-opt the Shudras to Aryan religious traditions and use them as fodder in their political ascendance and periodical aggression against Muslims and Christians.

For this to change, Kancha Ilaiah proposes a radical solution—Shudras, Dalits, and Adivasis should embrace

English education to empower themselves on a global scale and engage in philosophically significant issues of present times, rather than focus only on material gain or political power.

This work goes beyond the conventional academic framework by engaging with the spiritual, cognitive, and generational aspects of Shudra consciousness. The free spirit and mind of those labelled as Shudras has been tamed into servility and inferiority for several generations. The state of historical Chandalas and Nishadas and the contemporary Dalits and Adivasis is even more inhumane.

While Brahmins and Dalits constitute the extremes of the hierarchical Aryan spiritual imagination, it was Shudras, the servile castes who were forced to serve the so-called twice-born Varnas. But how the servile caste, even after having gained relative material progress, still lacks the spiritual and philosophical imagination to break free of the Brahminical worldview is a moot question.

It’s also puzzling why the historical oppression meted out to Shudras did not convince them to accept contemporary Dalit communities as their brothers and sisters in their spiritual and material quest for freedom, equality, and dignity.

For sure, ‘The Shudra Rebellion’ has the potential to raise more questions than it could answer. As the system of graded inequality is sophisticated, seamlessly subtle and violent at times, the best minds have to face these questions and guide people to an egalitarian future. A communion of the spade with the book—labour with philosophy—is a worthwhile experiment that could enable society to tolerate, if not enable and embrace a human consciousness that is just, kind, and free. □□□

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## LETTERS

**'Death Pits'**

**On 28th December, 2024**, Saturday, more than hundreds of manual scavengers engaged in sewers and septic tank workers, and several families of the victims who had died in the line of duty on the practice of manual scavengers gathered for the public hearing conducted by the Dalit Adivasi Shakti Adhikar Manch [DASAM] along with various organisations and unions at the Constitution Club of India, New Delhi. The public hearing was attended by various prominent activists from civil rights bodies, academicians, and advocates. So far only one conviction for 75 on-job deaths of workers engaged in plumbing toxic sewers.

Despite being outlawed, the practice of manual scavenging continues to claim the lives of sewer workers across India. The purpose of the public hearing was to provide a platform to hear the plight of families of the victims who lost their lives while cleaning the sewer and septic tanks and those who are still engaged in the obnoxious occupation and how the system responds to their issues. The victims' families, experts, and advocates came together and demanded systemic reforms and better enforcement of law.

Several families of sewer workers shared their grief and systemic failure faced in the process of seeking justice, such as being asked for multiple documents for receiving even the interim compensation..

- **The jury members of the public hearing were:**

Adv. Harnam Singh, Former Chairman of the Delhi Commission for Safai Karamcharis and ex-chairman of the Monitoring Committee, Delhi High Court, Vinod Kumar, Professor of Law and Director, Centre for Human Rights and Subaltern Studies at NLU Delhi, Shweta Tripathi, Executive Director, SRUTI (Society for Rural, Urban, and Tribal Initiatives), Adv. Naresh Bansal, Delhi High Court, Hemlata Kansotia, National Campaign for Dignity and Rights of Sewerage and Allied Workers.

At the end of the public hearing, the

jury members presented their recommendations and observations urging the government to address the problems faced by sewer workers and take immediate action.

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**'Jai Sri Ram'**

Bharatiya Janata Party was celebrating Atal Bihari Bajpayee's birthday in Patna on December 27, 2024. The singer invited to that programme started the programme with respectful salute to Mother India, Atology. Gandhiji's favourite song of freedom movement, Jai Jai Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram started the song. When she sang in the heart of the song, God Allah is your name. Immediately started Dhundhuma's incident. 70/80 people present in the meeting were shouting Jai Shri Ram. Even the entrepreneurs on the stage keep shouting Jai Shri Ram from the stage. The singer is asked to stop this song; she wants to sing this song. The singer means God has no religion, He resides in all religions. But the singer has to stop this song under the pressure of entrepreneurs. He is forced to shout Jai Shri Ram.

**Kajal Mukherjee, Kolkata  
Facing Closure**

You all know that the entire social movement and NGOs are going through a very serious phase. Due to a lack of resources, a large number of social movements have become inactive, and those who are left are facing many struggles.

PMARC's two most important interventions Dalit Media Watch and Justice News are going through a deep economic crisis.

You all know very well that for the last 18 years while working continuously for 365 days of the year, we have been making a significant contribution in the wide publicity dissemination and

coordination of information and dialogue related to various issues of people's movements and deprived classes.

PMARC's most important initiatives "Dalit Media Watch" and "Justice News" (justicenews.co.in) have been making a significant contribution in sensitizing the country's intellectual class, social movements, civil society, HR mechanisms and platforms, and various sections of society against various types of atrocities, especially atrocities against the Dalit class, and in favour of the victims, and favour of the victims.

Most importantly, these successes have been achieved so far without any regular or permanent resources. In which the personal contribution and cooperation of some people from time to time has played a very big role. This cooperation has always been received in special circumstances.

We are deeply grateful to all those people.

Unfortunately, now all such sources have ended and we all have come under a very big imminent danger. Our biggest compulsion is also that we have prepared an experienced trained team with long-term efforts, after whose disbandment it will take a long time and resources to restart this entire intervention.

Everyone is aware of the situation we are facing today and the biggest need of the time is that we all ensure through our collective efforts that our information, communication and coordination institutions continue to play their role uninterruptedly.

Therefore, we humbly appeal to all of you to help us strengthen the efforts of democracy and civil rights by contributing.

**PMRARC**

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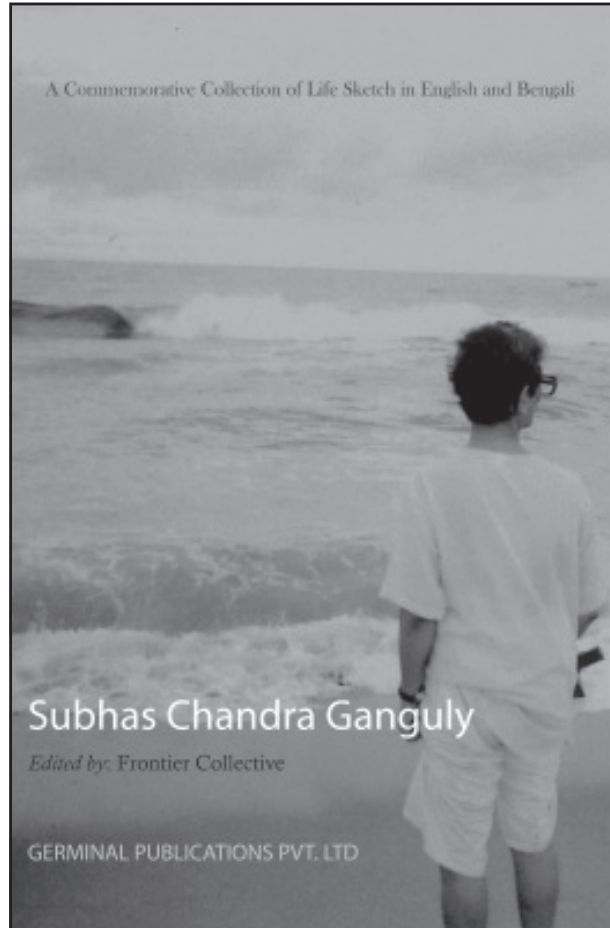
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