

# frontier

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## 'At a Crossroads'?

**I**N GEO-POLITICS A MOMENTOUS SHIFT IS TAKING PLACE THAT might lead to the end of Russia-Ukraine war. Poor Zelensky is now realising 'proxies are proxies', and they are likely to end up in most cases at 'doormats of history'. The way he was humiliated at the White House speaks volumes about imperial arrogance of America. Having failed to convince the Trump administration that a peace deal on Russian terms is not acceptable Zelensky finally tried to mobilise European support under the leadership of Britain and France but only 18 countries participated in much publicised Ukraine summit held in London without committing much other than some financial help. As there is no consensus on the course of action after the Trump-Zelensky talks collapsed they are now planning to assemble a "coalition of the willing" to defend Ukraine against Russia. And Britain and France have already pledged troops to Ukraine for peacekeeping. But the possibility of deployment of peacekeepers is uncertain as Ukraine is not yet ready to a Washington-brokered cease-fire and peace agreement. That some European countries are interested in continuing war is a fact of life. After America it is now the turn of Europeans to sell weapons to Ukraine. Britain has pledged a loan of 1.6 million pounds to Ukraine to enhance Kyiv's military capability. In truth it will be used to purchase British air-defence systems and missiles to boost ultimately Britain's defence industry and infrastructure while aggravating destruction of Ukraine further.

The only positive outcome of the three-year-old Russia-Ukraine war at the moment is there are visible fissures in NATO and Europeans' consistent efforts to isolate Russia have failed. For one thing European countries are actually trying to prolong the conflict by propping up Zelensky "with their bayonets in the form of peacekeeping units". But Russia's isolation is coming to an end slowly but steadily, as the US Defence Secretary has ordered US Cyber Command to halt offensive operations against Russia. Europeans are desperately trying to derail the America-Russia rapprochement process as they still think Ukraine may get back its lost territory by continuing the war. Both London and Paris are urging the White House to offer what is known as "a backstop" to a potential European peace-keeping force in the event of a deal between Kyiv and Moscow. A US backstop means possibly air cover and surveillance. In other words the European hawks are still not certain whether they will be able to withstand Russian onslaught in case the cease-fire fails.

Meanwhile, the NATO chief has asked Zelensky to make peace first with the Trump government and finalise the ‘minerals’ deal. Ukraine looks ready to clinch the deal because it has no other option to save the country. Even if the minerals deal were to be saved, the “security” it would offer Ukraine—and Europe—is far from clear, albeit Britain and France are trying to convince Trump that Europe can defend itself, but ‘Russia will only respect any ceasefire that comes with the backing of the United States’. Come what may, these Europeans are in no position to defy the US

and if the White House refuses to accept their peace-draft, they have nothing to do.

Despite all the noises emanated from London’s Ukraine summit, the idea of a sustainable peace agreement consequently remains remote, even if the breakdown of relations between Zelensky and Trump can be patched up. Without American support—assuming Europe fails to fill the gap—Ukraine would be forced to sue for peace on Russian terms. But once Trump succeeds in getting his stake in Ukraine, the negotiations enter a new phase. In any case Ukraine stands to lose, European support or no support.

‘Trumpism—alleged with India’s Modi, Hungary’s Orbán and Argentina’s Milei, as well as the fascist parties of Germany, Austria, Britain, Italy, France, Spain etc.—aims to remake the world under the domination of new forms of fascism—over the ashes of Ukraine and Gaza’. Ukrainians and Palestinians are the losers in this gambit. Even if America partially withdraws from the war, nothing will remain the same in the Atlantic Alliance and British Prime Minister’s contention that ‘we are at a crossroads of history’ may come true. □□□

03-03-2025

## COMMENT

### ‘Who Really Runs the World...’

WHEN THE OUTGOING US PRESIDENT Joe Biden warned against the domination of the USA by a tech-industrial complex, many people wondered if he in the course of his own Presidency and earlier had not been contributing to the same domination that he was now warning about.

However, this warning also prompted India’s leading newspaper *The Times of India* to bring out an interesting and useful primer titled ‘Who really runs the world—Answer will surprise you’ (published in the Delhi edition on January 22).

This primer has identified 8 industrial complexes which ‘run the world’—“a web of entrenched industrial forces that dwarf traditional government authority, in US and the rest of the world”. This is how the TOI’s listing of these industrial complexes goes—

1. Global Tech Industrial Complex
2. Global Military Industrial Complex
3. Global Arts and Entertainment Industrial Complex
4. Global Animal Agriculture Industrial Complex

5. Global Pharmaceutical Industrial Complex
6. Global Fast Food Industrial Complex
7. Global News Industrial Complex
8. Global Influencer Industrial Complex

In this list, the fossil fuel complex is not included although clearly in view of the enormous impact and influence of the fossil fuel industry this should have been included.

While discussing all of these complexes, *The Times of India primer* speaks only very briefly and, it appears, reluctantly about their adverse impacts. Although a few important facts and figures are revealed, such as the mass slaughter of as many as around 100 billion animals annually in the Global Animal Agriculture Industrial Complex, by and large this analysis falls far short of revealing the enormous, intolerably high social and environmental costs of these various industrial complexes.

This failure to bring out the enormous costs of these various industrial complexes is particularly glaring

in the context of the Global Military-Industrial Complex. *The Times of India primer* speaks of this most horribly destructive complex in a way that at the most is only very mildly critical. It fails to point out that the race to sell, supply and to profit from the ever-increasing manufacturing of weapons of ever-increasing destructiveness is responsible for the most painful killing, injuring and disabling of millions of people in recent years. What is more, this complex does not merely respond to the demand for weapons; it actually increases the possibility of more wars being caused or the existing wars getting more prolonged and extended. This horrible possibility is increasing because of very high levels of corruption, sometimes routine and ‘legalised’ corruption as seen in those connected to the manufacturers of the most destructive weapons being very close to the seats of power in countries like the USA, and often former officials in charge of decision making relating to wars later finding highly lucrative positions with the leading arms corporations and military contractors.

Some of the industrial complexes are responsible for inflicting very serious harm on health, nutrition and

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on healthy social discourse and relationships. In significant ways some of the industrial complexes are accentuating the environmental crisis. It is deeply worrying that at a time when the many-sided environmental

crisis is threatening the basic-life nurturing conditions of the planet, many industrial complexes are functioning in ways that lead to accentuating this crisis further. □□□

[Contributed by Bharat Dogra]

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#### NOTE

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## Promoting Girls' Education in Bengal

*Harasankar Adhikari writes:*

**T**HIS YEAR (2025), AN OFFICIAL source stated that 555,950 girls, out of around 984,000 students, appeared for the Secondary Examination (Madhyamik) in West Bengal. It is significant that the female literacy rate of West Bengal has increased. 'The literacy rate of females in West Bengal grew from 36.56% in 1981 to 46.56% in 1991, 60.22% in 2001, and 71.16% in 2011, according to the Census. In 2023, the female literacy rate in rural areas is 72.6, while in urban areas it is 84.7.'

The government in rule claims that 'Kanyashree' and 'Sabuj Sathi' are the generous efforts for the above success. 'Kanyashree' usually offers annually one thousand rupees to the girls between the age group of 13-18 years. So, a girl may get this facility when she reaches class VIII standard. The amount of direct cash transfer under this scheme is very nominal compared to the cost of education in today's education market. Secondly, the 'Sabuj Sathi' scheme is 'for distribution of bicycles to the students of class IX to XII in all government-run/government-aided/government-sponsored schools. Both of these schemes are entitled to the girl students of Govt. Run/Govt. Aided/Govt. Sponsored schools only.

May it be a true credit of the government for this improvement of girls' education, or is it a political propaganda for political gain or vote business?

It is evident that the overall education system (from school education to the university level) suffers from several lacks, i.e., poor administration, school job scams, mid-day meal scams, and also the latest but not the least, the 'Sabuj Sathi' scam, etc. The school teachers are either incapable of teaching or they are undutiful in their profession. Most of the pupils depend on private tuition, even in remote areas. In fact, education is now a big investment for the parents for the ranking of their wards. Evidently, parents bear a handsome monthly cost for their girl child's education (when the amount of 'Kanyashree' is very low) regardless of their economy, and it is a trend that without private tuition, not a single student will reach the goal of a higher grade. The quality of education or learning capacity is a big question in the present context.

It is evident that numerous influential factors are associated with this. Firstly, a change of parental attitude towards girls' education is the foremost. Parents of all backgrounds gradually change their mindset about girls from liabilities to assets in their families. Further, these girls are mostly second-generation learners, and their parents adopted small family norms, and sex determination of the foetus has been restricted. Social circumstances have been gradually changing so that girls are more concerned about parental

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care at their old age than the boy (male child) in a family. Further, in rural Bengal, the male child is not interested in accessing higher education because of the unemployment scenario of the state. Higher education is a waste of time for the boys of especially lower middle classes or lower class people of West Bengal. So, they have to migrate even at their age of 15 years in different states of India in search of jobs in various unorganized or informal sectors. They also support their sister's education. Parents have changed their mindset to avoid girls' underage marriage.

So, at the grassroots level, parents have realised the importance of women's equity and justice through girls' education. Is it not a significant impact of globalisation? □□□

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## A PIONEER

## Suniti Kumar Ghosh: His Contribution to Indian Historiography—I

**Amit Bhattacharyya**

[In the present section on Suniti Kumar Ghosh's contribution to Indian historical studies, we begin with his book, 'Imperialism's Tightening Grip on Indian Agriculture'.]

IN THE PREFACE TO THE BOOK, Ghosh observed:

"Science and Technology have given man powers which could not be conceived a few decades ago. If those powers are used for the good of mankind, they can banish want and misery from the whole world and enrich the life of every person on earth—materially and culturally. But those powers are used by a small minority, especially a few trans-nationals based in imperialist countries, among which the USA is prominent, for their own profit, for exploiting the resources of the entire world, for dominating other countries, especially the countries of the third world and for plundering them. Those who possess vast economic power also wield immense political power..."

"Multilateral world organizations like the United Nations, the World Bank, the and the World Trade Organization, which control the different aspects of the lives of the world's peoples, are in reality controlled by a few imperialist powers, chief among which is the USA".

"Science and technology have been harnessed to the imperialist chariot. Like other branches of science and technology, biochemistry and genetic engineering are made to serve the imperialists. Never before have so few exploited and oppressed so many... Perhaps this may be described as the highest stage of imperialism". In this book, Ghosh analyses the nature of the 'Green Revolution' and its impact on Indian agriculture. This book is divided into nine chapters: Colonial Legacy, Land

Reforms, Community Development Programme, Dependence on the USA for Food, Imperialist Restructuring of India's Agricultural System, Green Revolution Phase 1, Superior Indigenous Technology suppressed, Elite Training, Green Revolution Phase:2 and Agrarian Relations.

Indian agriculture, like other aspects of the Indian economy, was controlled by imperialism. During the colonial period, the British ruling class transformed Indian countryside into an agricultural hinterland for the supply of raw material to metropolitan Britain. What was true of the colonial period is generally no less true of the period after independence. In the post-1947 period, it was the USA, rather than the UK which took the lead in globalizing the world in her own interest. The object of America was to transform Indian economy in a way that serves the interests of US transnational corporations. The aim, according to Ghosh, was to decide for India what to produce and how to produce and to make Indian agriculture an appendage of imperialist capital. Let us begin our discussion with the period immediately following the transfer of power in 1947.

**Land Reforms:** Beset with various contradictions, the British imperialists, according to Ghosh, thought it prudent to transfer power in 1947 to "friendly and reliable hands", who would preserve their economic, strategic and political interests. The Indian big bourgeoisie, comprador in nature, and the big landlords, mainly feudal in character, became the new

ruling classes of India, pledged to keep India within the British Commonwealth (Ghosh, p.9). In this alliance the former class was the major partner.

During the transfer of power, native states were merged into the Indian Union and their princes who retained vast lands and other personal possessions India was faced, were rewarded with princely 'privy purses' for many years and a number of them were elevated to high official positions as governors, ministers, ambassadors etc.

But India's ruling classes could hardly ignore the severe agrarian crisis with which India was faced. Food shortage was very acute and famine conditions prevailed in India before and after 1947. The Telangana peasant struggle soon developed into a peasant struggle for both land and state power.

In fact, in their many rhetorical exercises before and after 1947, Congress leaders like Nehru talked of 'land to the tiller'. All these, according to Suniti Kumar Ghosh, were but "sops to the restive peasantry against the background of their militant struggles" (*ibid*).

The agrarian problem in India caused much concern to the US imperialists, too, who had grown sadder and wiser after being driven out of China in 1949. According to Chester Bowles, US Ambassador to India in the early 1950s and also in the 1960s, "In the coldest terms of stopping communism...the democratic world simply must carry out these [land] reforms before Communists can use the lack of them as an excuse to overthrow democracy" (Chester Bowles, *Ambassador's Report*, pp.175-76). In 1952, he brought to India the foremost US experts in land policy, Wolf Ladejinsky and Professor Kenneth Parsons of the University of Wisconsin. He tried to impress



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on Nehru the urgent need for land reforms, the inadequacy in which Bowles regarded as “one of the most important weaknesses in the Nehru government”. After making intensive studies of several states ‘Ladejinsky reported that the bitter complaints of the peasants reminded him of similar complaints he heard in pre-Communist China in 1946. The land inequalities, he said, were as bad or even worse than he had seen anywhere in Asia” (*Ibid*, pp.114, 185).

The political and economic conditions, as Ghosh argues, urged the ruling classes to undertake some agrarian legislations. Different constituent states of the Indian Union enacted legislations like zamindari abolition and land ceiling acts. By the zamindari abolition acts the government acquired the interests of the ‘*topmost layer of a hierarchy of intermediaries*’ by paying compensation to them. The burden of it mostly fell on the peasants themselves. The zamindars were allowed to retain *khasland* and resume more in the name of cultivating it themselves. As a class the intermediaries between the state and the actual tillers the soil were not removed. The land ceiling legislations after making liberal concessions to the large landowners, religious institutions, orchards, plantations, sugar-cane firms owned by sugar factories and so on, left such loopholes which allowed owners of large landed property to retain their possessions. In fact, before the enactment of the legislations they were permitted sufficient time to divide their landed property and hold it in their own, their relatives’ as well as under fictitious names.

Thus whole land reform legislations hardly benefitted the bulk of the actual tillers of the soil and as such were but a farce. According to Ghosh, all talk of taking over the land in excess of ceilings (which were fixed quite high) and distribut-

ing the surplus among the poor and landless peasants proved in practice to be mere rhetoric. According to a study undertaken by the statistical division of the Reserve Bank of India, the share of the lowest 25 per cent of rural households in the assets of all rural households in the country was only 1.3 per cent (*Economic Times*, 30 October, 1976).

In fact, more than 70 per cent of those who depend on agriculture as their main means of livelihood are poor peasants with very small plots of land and landless agricultural workers.

Suniti Kumar Ghosh was quite right while arguing that the land reform legislations were not intended by the ruling classes, notwithstanding their loud rhetoric, to bring about any significant changes in the ownership of land. In one of his speeches at the Nagpur session of the Congress held in the late 1950s, Nehru, the ‘architect of modern India’, said that “*Though the imposition of ceilings would affect only an infinitesimal minority of landlords, and though its actual practical gains would not be much, the sentimental gains would be tremendous*” (*AICC Economic Review*, 1 February 1959, p.23; cited in Grigory Kotovsky, *Agrarian Reforms in India*, p.104). On the contrary, agrarian legislations actually strengthened the positions of the landlords and the upper strata of the peasantry.

According to Ghosh, the basic problem—the problem of ownership of land was not solved by the agrarian legislations: there was no fundamental change in the property structure of the rural society. It was not the purpose of the land legislations to solve the land problem, to liquidate semi-feudalism, the colonial legacy, but to curb the grosser manifestations of and develop capitalism in agriculture to some extent, convert gradually a section of landlords

and rich peasants and into capitalist farmers and increase agricultural production.

On the contrary, the land reforms were intended to serve another purpose, no less important: this was to sow illusions among the peasantry, make “sentimental gains”, as Nehru remarked, and draw the bulk of the peasantry away from revolutionary struggles. In this task, as Ghosh asserts, the ruling classes found an ally in the Communist Party of India.

In fact, the kind of agrarian reforms undertaken by the Indian ruling classes, as Paul Baran pointed out, fails to break the feudal grip on the state. “They tend, therefore, as he observed, “to accentuate all the negative repercussions of agrarian reforms without leading the way to industrial development and to reorganization and rationalization of the agrarian economy resulting therefrom” (*The Political Economy of Growth*, p.169 fn; also p.170).

In fact, land ‘reforms’ failed to solve India’s problems. ‘Reformed’ agriculture could contribute not much surplus for investment in industry. Nor could it create a sufficiently large market for industrial goods. Without an agrarian revolution there could be no industrial regeneration.

#### **Community Development Programme**

The Community Development Programme, which formed an integral part of India’s early five-year-plans, and the aim of which was the rebuilding of India’s villages and village-life, was undertaken under US inspiration and with US assistance. Ghosh points out that the programme, as Selig Harrison writes, “has a special significance for Americans because it was the American architect and town-planner, Albert Meyer, who developed the experimental project, at Etawah.” Chester Bowles brought US technical assis-

tance funds and American rural sociologist, Douglas Ensminger, who directed Ford Foundation training of the Indians for the new 'Community projects'. (Quoted in Rajani Palme Dutt, *India Today*, pp.274-75). Albert Meyer, who had served with the US army during World War II and who enjoyed Nehru's confidence, developed in 1948 a pilot project covering 64 villages in Etawah in Uttar Pradesh with official support. As Ghosh argues, there were other more important factors in the launching of the project. In fact, Nehru expected it to serve "as a model for meeting the revolutionary threats from left-wing and communist peasant movements demanding basic social reforms in agriculture", as George Rosen asserts. (George Rosen, *Western Economists and Eastern Societies*, p.49, emphasis added).

The aims of the programme were lofty ones: not only intensive agricultural development—land reclamation, irrigation, farm management, crop protection, application of scientific methods of cultivation like the use of improved seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and better implements—but also improvement of health and education, social welfare, road-building, formation of cooperative societies and so on. The whole of rural India was expected to be covered by the programme by stages. The programme proposed the formation of cooperative societies and panchayats, which would be entrusted with the task of framing plans of all-embracing village development and implementing them. In this way, the entire face of rural India was expected to be transformed—peacefully *without any change in the property structure and avoiding all class conflict*, as Ghosh observes.

Nehru was eloquent about the "peaceful revolution" that was unfolding. Inaugurating the first community projects in October 1952, he

declared that "the work we are starting today" was the beginning of a great social revolution. He proclaimed: "*we are now talking in terms of a big revolution, a peaceful revolution. Not of turmoil and the breaking of heads.* It is in this manner that we shall transform our country. Peacefully, we shall remove the evils of our country and promote a better order. (Francine R. Frankel, *India's Political Economy 1947-1977*, pp.101-9); the quote is on p.109—emphasis added). As a matter of fact, as Suniti Kumar Ghosh argued, Nehru sought to use the programme to create an illusion among the oppressed peasantry that it was possible to reconcile the irreconcilables—the interests of the landlords and usurers with those of their victims. He expected through such device and his rhetoric to inspire the latter with the ideals which were transforming the face of post-Revolution rural China.

In fact, both the Nehrus and the US imperialists felt that the conditions in rural India were quite serious. They were afraid that if some important steps were taken, India might go the China way.

The Ford and Rockefeller Foundations lent their support to the programme. US Aid for International Development (USAID) and the Ford Foundation worked together on the Community Development Programme. For its implementation, funds were provided by Ford Foundation, the USAID and the US Department of Agriculture, among others. About 50,000 workers were trained under the Ford programmes. The US land-grant universities and the Rockefeller Foundation were invited to help in setting up Indian agricultural universities and agricultural research institutions. Institutes like the Indian Statistical Institute, the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), the Delhi School

of Economics and the Gokhale Institute in Pune worked in collaboration with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and were provided with funds by the Ford Foundation.

There is no doubt that the programme yielded fruit. But, Ghosh asks, what happened to Nehru's "big revolution", "peaceful revolution"?

"Besides 'bringing some Americans and some Indians together', it consolidated the interests of the landlords and moneylenders, who alone were able to take advantage of the 'community projects'—the government funds that were invested in them and institutions created by the government like the credit co-operative societies and panchayats' (Ghosh, p.18).

Jayaprakash Narayan was not when he said: "You take the village as it is and you give it the right of electing the panchayat and carrying on certain functions and duties. What will happen in such a village? ...the dominant castes or a few leading families or the bullies will capture the panchayats and run them for their own use". (Quoted in Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama II*, p.884, fn.2).

Ghosh argues that during that period, cooperative farming, like socialism, was a populist slogan. In China, co-operative farming had banished chronic hunger. But for its success, a protracted revolution of the violent type had been essential to get rid of the age-old political, economic and social system. However, Nehru's 'peaceful revolution', revolution without tears, only strengthened the social and economic status quo and the imperialist grip over Indian agricultural system. Quite naturally, it failed to resolve the food problem or the problem of employment of vast human resources in the countryside. Thus the food crisis grew worse with the passing of days. □□□ [To be continued]

## A FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

## The Tibet Question Returns

*Yeshi Choedon*

**T**IBET BECAME AN OCCUPIED country following the defeat of the Tibetan army in the Battle of Chamdo in October 1950 and the subsequent Chinese military advance. The Question of Tibet was first considered at the United Nations in 1951. It has been discussed at various international forums for over seven decades. Despite being repeatedly labelled as a "lost cause" due to countries' reluctance to confront China's overwhelming power, the resilient spirit of the Tibetan people has consistently returned the issue to international attention. In the current era of wasteland of morality in international relations, the Question of Tibet faces new significant challenges such as China's Assimilative Education Policies in Tibet, the Yarlung Tsangpo Dam project, and the contentious issue of the Dalai Lama's reincarnation.

When the Tibetan Government appealed to the United Nations for intervention in November 1950, El Salvador responded by submitting a draft resolution entitled "Invasion of Tibet by Foreign Forces." Rather than discussing the resolution, the UN deferred discussion on the pretext of Tibet's unclear status. The major powers found a convenient excuse for not taking any measures to the crisis developing in Tibet. A full-scale discussion occurred only after Tibet's 1959 revolt against Chinese rule. Even then, the issue was framed merely as "human rights violations," deliberately avoiding the political dimensions of Tibet's occupation. This reduction of Tibet's national subjugation to a human rights matter conveniently aligned with the strategic interests of major powers.

Although the Government of In-

dia could not provide political support to the Question of Tibet, its assistance in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Tibetan society and institutions in India made a lasting contribution to the cause of Tibet. Unlike typical host countries that pursue assimilation policies to integrate refugees into their societies, India established autonomous Tibetan settlements across the country specifically designed to preserve Tibetan identity and culture—the very elements facing systematic destruction and sinicisation in Tibet. The Government of India has given autonomous power to the Tibetan Exile Government to manage the Tibetan settlements in India. It also set up the Central Tibetan School Administration (CTSA) in 1961 to establish, manage and assist schools in India for the education of Tibetan refugee children while preserving and promoting their culture and heritage. Three generations of Tibetan refugees have now lived in these settlements, with most of the second and third generations of Tibetans educated in these schools under CTSA.

A significant challenge for the Tibetan community in India emerged from its educational success: a growing population of qualified but unemployed Tibetan youth. Their stateless status disqualifies them from many employment opportunities in India. Furthermore, economic activities outside Tibetan settlements face substantial barriers—Tibetans cannot legally own businesses, obtain licenses, purchase land, or secure bank loans. These constraints have propelled Tibetan migration to Western countries and other parts of the world wherever they got an opportunity.

Yet, this global dispersal has

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strengthened rather than weakened the Tibetan freedom movement. Wherever they have settled, the Tibetans formed Tibetan Associations and registered them as NGOs in their host countries. These organisations serve dual purposes: preserving and promoting Tibetan culture among the younger generation while globalising the Tibetan cause and amplifying voices silenced within Tibet.

The rise of China as a global power and its growing economic clout by the turn of the Century has made the countries traditionally supportive of the Tibetan movement capitulate to China's pressure. A clear indication of this trend has been the increasing tendency of the leaders to avoid meetings with the Dalai Lama, as Beijing views such meetings as part of a Western plot to split China. Some of the host countries have even placed restrictions and resorted to suppression of Tibetan activities in their countries. Even in South Asia, Tibetans have encountered the brunt of the Chinese appeasement policy of the host countries.

In recent years, international relations have undergone significant transformations, with states increasingly prioritising their self-interest over collective well-being and the moral principle of rights and wrongs, accelerating a moral decay in international

relations. In this period of 'wasteland of morality', China has intensified its control over Tibet through heightened surveillance, religious restrictions, and suppression of dissent. Three critical challenges now confront Tibetans: China's Assimilative Education Policies, China's YarlungTsangpo Dam project, and the reincarnation of the 14th Dalai Lama.

Perhaps most alarming is China's establishment of mandatory boarding schools for Tibetan children, separating them from their families, language, and culture. These institutions subject children to political indoctrination and forced assimilation. Human rights organisations report that nearly one million Tibetan children are enrolled in distant boarding schools. They could achieve this scheme through the strategic closure of rural schools in predominantly Tibetan areas. However, these developments have not led to a strong reaction from the international community, except for a few reports by the UN agencies, international non-governmental organisations and some media outlets. It is futile to expect a strong reaction in this era of morally decadent international relations.

Another current issue of great concern is China's YarlungTsangpo Dam Project. Despite repeated warnings from scientists of the disastrous effect of the growing degradation and desertification of the Tibet Plateau, China continues with major infrastructure projects such as dams and railway networks. China's YarlungTsangpo Dam project is the world's largest hydropower dam in the Tibetan plateau. This could significantly affect the Tibetans by displacing them from their traditional lands, disrupting their livelihood and delicate ecosystem. This dam project could make the Tibetans bear huge environmental, human and cultural costs. Without global pressure, Tibetans face the irreversible loss of their

land, livelihoods, and cultural heritage. Yet, little international attention has been paid to the effect of the YarlungTsangpo Dam Project on Tibetans in Tibet. Their focus is primarily on China's weaponisation of water and the negative effect on downstream countries, such as India and Bangladesh, rather than the existential threat to Tibetans in the region. It displays, once again, the moral decay of current international relations.

The reincarnation of the Dalai Lama is crucial for Tibetans as it symbolises the continuity of spiritual leadership and the preservation of Tibetan culture. The issue has become geopolitically charged again as the Dalai Lama is approaching 90 years old. China seeks to control the process to legitimise its authority over Tibet. China asserts exclusive authority to recognise his successor.

Meanwhile, the current 14th Dalai Lama has indicated he may not reincarnate at all and thus end the reincarnation lineage or may reincarnate outside Tibet and China's control or choose his successor in a way that prevents external interference. Recently, he allayed the apprehension of his followers and assured them by announcing that he would live until age 113. Although the Tibetans are pacified with the prospect of the Dalai Lama remaining alive till 113, the US, China and India are active in their strategies of dealing with the issue as they have a great stake in it. Thus, the reincarnation question will not remain just a spiritual matter but a critical flashpoint in global politics.

Beijing will most likely come out with its own reincarnated Dalai Lama after the passing of the 14th Dalai Lama, which will not be acceptable to the Tibetans, the US, and India. India and the US may come out with their own reincarnated Dalai Lamas. Thus, multiple competing "reincarnations" may emerge, but

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none of them will belong to Tibetans, as the Tibetans, both in Tibet and exile, are powerless.

The Tibet question stands as a stark example of the morally decadent state of international relations, where the notion of right and wrong is sacrificed for political, strategic, and economic interests. As a result, Tibetans in Tibet continue to endure repression, cultural erasure, and envi-

ronmental destruction. However, the Question of Tibet is not likely to disappear as Tibetan migrants throughout Europe, the US, Japan, Taiwan, Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere have expanded the Tibetan movement's scope and reach. Their activism, along with Tibetan youth's activism in various universities, serves as ambassadors for the cause of Tibet and the voice for the voiceless

in Tibet. Thus, their activism, alongside global civil society and some courageous media outlet support, ensures the Question of Tibet remains alive even in this era of moral decay of international relations.

*[Tibetans observe March 10 as their uprising day every year. The article was written on the occasion to highlight their plight and how the so-called international community refuses to recognise their right to self-determination.-Fr]*

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## WAR VETERANS SPEAK OUT

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### Wars without Victors

*Bharat Dogra*

**I**N SEVERAL CONTEXTS IT needs to be emphasized that increasingly there are no victors in present day wars. In several significant ways those who proclaim themselves to be victors and are even recognized as such by most others also suffer serious harm at physical as well as moral and mental levels. Many weapons leave such a toxic trail that even those who use them to kill and hurt others are harmed, sometimes in very painful ways. Less visible is the moral and ethical crisis created among conquerors and conqueror societies due to the enormous number of people they kill and harm in pursuit of false and dubious objectives.

The soldiers of most invading armies are often assigned very cruel tasks. However beneath their helmets and uniforms they too are human beings with fears and feelings. The war affect them in two clear ways. Firstly there is the risk of personal injury, disability and long-term serious harm caused by exposure to various weapons, bombs, ammunitions and materials. Secondly there is the less visible but nevertheless perhaps even more significant risk of how their minds and hearts will be affected on a permanent basis when they have performed those cruel and

unjust tasks that have been assigned to them. After all these young men and women have absorbed at least some ideals in their education and before being sent to fight they were probably encouraged to think of themselves as liberators. When they see that their actual assignment is highly unethical and cruel, this is bound to have a very disturbing impact on the minds of these young soldiers of the invading army.

Speaking of their experience of two wars the veterans of the US armed forces have stated in a statement, "In the Gulf War (of 1991), as troops, we were ordered to murder from a safe distance. We destroyed much of Iraq from the air, killing hundreds of thousands, including civilians. We remember the road to Basra - The Highway to Death - where we were ordered to kill fleeing Iraqis. We bulldozed trenches, burying people alive. The use of depleted uranium weapons left the battlefields radioactive. Massive use of pesticides, experimental drugs, burning chemical weapons depots and oil fires combined to create a toxic cocktail affecting both the Iraqi people and Gulf War veterans today. *One in four Gulf War veterans is disabled.*

"During the Vietnam War we were

ordered to destroy Vietnam from the air and on the ground. At **My Lai** we massacred over 500 women, children and old men. This was not an aberration, it's how we fought the war. We used Agent Orange on the enemy and then experienced first-hand its effects. We know what PostTraumatic Stress Disorder looks, feels and tastes like because the ghosts of over two million men, women and children still haunt our dreams. More of us took our own lives after returning home than died in battle."

It is evident from this statement of war veterans, who have seen and experienced present day military invasions more than anyone else, that-

- So dangerous are present day weapons that even the winning side of a one-sided war is likely to suffer heavy physical damage.
- Even in one-sided wars, soldiers of the stronger side are habitually asked by superiors to inflict massive unbearable cruelty and kill without any need for killing.
- All this cruelty is of course most horrible for the victims but it also leaves permanent scars on the victors, on those soldiers who are forced to inflict these cruelties.

This last aspect, frequently ignored, is very important for understanding the enormous costs of war for the victors. As the veterans of US armed forces have clearly said of the Vietnam experience, "More of us took

*our own lives after returning home than died in battle.*"

The parents of many American soldiers going to war are aware of these risks, as is evident in several statements released by the organisation 'Military Families Speak Out' around the time of the invasion of Iraq in 2003. One parent Stephen Cleghorn said, "If we go to war in Iraq, the loss of innocent civilian lives will be high and horrific... The soldiers in the area will know what they have done. They will see it with their own eyes or they will see it in the eyes of their fellow soldiers." Nancy Lessin and Charley Richardson said about their son, "We don't want him to be wounded or die. We don't want him to be forced to wound or kill innocent Iraqi civilians. *That would kill a part of him—and a part of us.*"

This then, is the invisible cost of war. Reader's Digest has described the suffering of a child, Kim Phuc at the time of bombing of Trang Bang (Vietnam) by US planes (R.D. November 1997),

"The bombs, canisters filled with napalm, had smashed into ground behind Kim and instantly ignited. The jellified gasoline, designed to stick to and incinerate anything it touches, splashed onto Kim's back. Her flowered cotton shirt and pants—even her sandal—combusted. She was engulfed in a cloud of smoke

and fire as napalm peeled away the skin from her back and left arm. Terrified, Kim kept running. At first she could feel nothing. Then she felt as if she had been thrown onto an open fire. In horror she saw the skin drop off her arm like clothes off a doll. As she ran naked down the road that led out of the village, she began screaming, "Too hot! Too hot! Please help!"

This magazine also noted the impact of this suffering on the sensitive mind of the pilot who caused this suffering: "Now he stared at the picture of Kim Phuc, her agony caught for eternity. His own son Louis was about the same age. He could almost smell the child's burning flesh.

...Later he kept his role in the bombing of Trang Bang secret, locked deep within his soul. It surfaced in the form of a nightmare. First Plummer would see a picture of Kim, with arms outstretched and mouth frozen in a silent scream. Then the image would widen to include Kim's brother and cousins running alongside her. Finally, he would hear their screams, louder and louder until he felt surrounded by the accusing children. To drown his guilt, Plummer began drinking heavily. In July 1973 he married for the second time, but he still kept his secret. No one can understand, he thought. John Plummer's drinking

cost him his marriage in 1979. It was a vicious circle; he drank to put the bombing out of his mind, but the drinking made him more obsessed."

Apart from tormenting the sensitive mind forever, war-time cruelties can also have a somewhat different impact. In order to come to terms with the cruelties inflicted by them, some soldiers deliberately train their minds to become very insensitive to human suffering. This insensitivity later enters into their close personal relationships and can destroy them. Thus domestic violence has been reported at very high levels among soldiers of several invading armies that have been involved in cruel acts.

A person (or group or nation) who inflicts injustice and injury on others, will either live with a guilt complex (if he wants to retain some sensitivity) or else he'll have to reduce himself to a level of insensitivity that will prevent him from feeling small but precious joys of everyday life and this in turn is bound to adversely affect his closest relationships including those with his family members. Thus relationships of dominance are not only destructive, these are also self-destructive. □□□

*[The writer is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include Protecting Earth for Children, Planet in Peril, Earth without Borders, A Day in 2071 and Man over Machine—A Path to Peace.]*

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#### RAY'S CLASSIC AND HOLLYWOOD'S EVERYMAN

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## 'Nayak' and Gene Hackman

*Tirthankar Mitra*

NAYAK, SATYAJIT RAY'S 13TH feature film and his first collaboration with Uttam Kumar was re-released recently today in 15 theatres in Kolkata together with halls in Pune, Hyderabad, Chennai, Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru.

This is a restored version of the

1966 film. It is considered to be one of Ray's best works.

The re-release will be an introduction of the iconic film to the younger generation. Many of the older generation and the young who had seen it on television will appreciate it all the more on the big screen.

It took quite some time for this all time classic to reappear on big screen. It was restored way back in 2013.

Known for his unerring eye to spot the pluses and shortcomings of an actor, Ray had once said that Uttam Kumar had the ability to get under the skin of any character.

Strangely enough, Kumar yet to be crowned Mahanayak by the film fraternity did not need to get under the skin of the character he played

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in Nayak. For the matinee idol was enacting his everyday life on the screen and off it.

Nayak remains a landmark work in celluloid in which a matinee idol's life is deconstructed. Uttam Kumar delivers a masterly performance arguably the best of his career as an insecure and lonely thespian, Arindam

Arindam is at the top of his career. Yet he has to take sleeping pills to forget the spectre of failure dogging his footsteps.

Nayak goes into issues of acting on stage and screen. The theme of fragility of fame runs throughout the film.

Sharmila Tagore in the role of an aspiring journalist finds unexpected access to Arindam during a train journey. The darling of the crowd is on his way to Delhi to pick up a national award.

The scribe senses a story and comes across a side of the matinee idol which he would have revealed to her under everyday circumstances.

It can be ascribed to Arindam's insecurity, inebriation and his unexplained urge to open his heart to an individual who cares two hoots about the glamour and glitter of the film world.

### **Gene Hackman**

Son of a pressman in a local newspaper and a waitress, Eugene Allen Hackman better known as Gene Hackman was found dead with his wife and dog at Santa Fe, New Mexico on 26 February. Playing ordinary characters with a subtlety that was deceptive, intensity and often charm most of his notable films hit the screen in the '70s and '80s, was 95.

Nominated for five Academy Awards and having won two during his 40-year-long career, Hackman never fit the mould of a Hollywood top drawer star.

Remembered for his roles in *The French Connection*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Unforgiven*, *Hoosiers* and *Poseidon Adventure* to name a few; he was Hollywood's perfect

Everyman. War hero, sheriff, convict, steel worker, spy and Minister are some of the roles he had essayed with a rare credibility.

Hackman seemed to have been born middle-aged, neither all or handsome. He was a tall man who would not stand out in a crowd.

But Gene Hackman was his own man all the same. He served in Marine Corps in 1946 after lying about his age.

Hackman served in China, Hawaii and Japan. At one point of time, he worked as a disc jockey in his unit's radio station.

He studied journalism at the University of Illinois for six months after his discharge. Thereafter, he went to New York to learn television production.

In his screen performances, good guys are not always nice guys. And his villains had charm.

There is no identifiable quality which made him stand out. Gene Hackman just made himself outstandingly vital and real. □□□

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## ANTI-PEOPLE BUDGET

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### Much Ado about Nothing

**Sandeep Pandey**

**I**N THE BUDGET PRESENTED for 2025-26 much hullabaloo has been made about the income tax exemption limit having been raised from Rs. 7 lakh to Rs. 12 lakh. Only the salaried class stands to gain from this move. How many people in this country are able to earn Rs 1 lakh per month or more than Rs 3,000 per day? This appears to be more of a populist measure from which majority of the population will remain unaffected.

Now consider the government's approach towards areas which impact the lives of common people. Between 2014-15, when Modi came to power, to present, 2024-25, the

size of budget has grown by 11.8%, however expenditure on education reduced from 4.15% to 2.25% of the budget, health and family welfare budget expenditure reduced from 1.87% to 1.76% of the budget, budget expenditure on MNREGS reduced from 1.99% to 1.7% of the budget, budget expenditure on food subsidy reduced from 6.93% to 3.88% of the budget, budget expenditure on skill development reduced from 0.0006% to 0.00059% of the budget. On the contrary capital expenditure of budget increased from 11.87% to 20.12%. Thus priorities of Modi government are clear. Schemes like the MNREGS or PDS,

which stood the government in good stead during the Covid lockdown period have become target of cuts whereas capital expenditure which mostly benefits the private corporations and well to do in society is being given a major push. It is not clear how things like Railway station makeovers benefit the common passenger when Sleeper Class, General Class coaches are being reduced and Sleeper Class Waiting rooms are being wound up in favour of paid AC Waiting rooms? One of the reasons for the recent New Delhi station stampede is the large number of passengers were oversold tickets for the General Class whereas the coaches for this class are only a few in numbers in any express or mail train. It would have been better if the government, instead of building highways and expressways, which

are going to be used by only the rich, relatively well off middle class and middle class - people who'll normally travel in cars and buses, would have expanded the capacity of railways. Bus fares are now a number of times that of railways general or sleeper class and hence beyond the reach of poor and lower middle classes. The money which is being used for makeover of railway stations should have instead been used for laying more rail lines, introducing more trains with more general class and ordinary sleeper class coaches so that lower middle class and poor people could travel with dignity. However, the government is busy launching more Vande Bharat trains with all AC coaches and high fare, which the common people of this country cannot afford. It is no surprise that tickets to Vande Bharat trains are undersold. This is a stark example of the misplaced priorities of this government.

Agriculture is another area which has been ignored by the government. Whereas, it cares about the salaried middle class, which is the opinion making class, it doesn't bother about the farmers, artisans and labourers. The government stoutly refuses to make minimum support price a legal guarantee, thereby denying the farmers a defi-

nite income. The farmer continues to be in debt. Another problem which has been consistently ignored is that of stray cattle. Since the cattle market was shut down in the name of banning cow slaughter and all buying-purchasing of cattle suspended due to mob lynching incidents of people moving with cattle or accused of having consumed beef, the cattle which are of no use of farmers are freely moving around and eating away the crops of farmers. Only the rich farmer is able to fence his fields, which too has been declared illegal if bladed wires are used. Even if the government, for example in Uttar Pradesh, has a budget to feed cattle, it doesn't have a budget to build cow shelters at every Gram Sabha level. The cow shelters can, in any case, house not more than a couple of hundreds of cattle while thousands roam around outside. There is large scale corruption in supply of fodder and cattle die of hunger and disease inside cow shelters. The larger objective of preventing death of cows is not being achieved, anyway.

Government schools are being closed. Private schools are not willing to admit children belonging to disadvantaged groups and weaker sections under section 12(1)(c) of the Right to Education Act. Hence

opportunity of education for underprivileged children is shrinking. Half the children in India do not cross the class VIII stage and less than a fourth enter colleges or universities. Yogi government takes credit for sending 5,600 labourers to Israel. India is today looked upon by the developed world as a supplier of cheap labour - whether in IT industry or manual jobs. The Prime Minister takes pride in 'Make in India' narrative. The state moved from 'Made in India,' i.e., manufacturing in India with Indian investment to 'Make in India,' an euphemism for exploitation of cheap Indian labour and natural resources by the MNCs. Narendra Modi is smartly able to hide the compromise that India is making behind a glittering development of underutilised expressways and airports.

What can be more shameful for the government that on one hand government schools are being shut down and on the other liquor shops are thriving, with foreign liquor shops fancier than the domestic ones. In fact excise policy is being thrust upon people, whereas government is withdrawing from education. This implies that the youth will not only remain illiterate or semi-literate but will also be drunkards. □□□

[Sandeep Pandey is General Secretary, Socialist Party-India]

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## CHILDREN WITHOUT CHILDHOOD

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### Child Soldiers—from Manipur to Bastar

*Prasun Goswami*

**M**ANIPUR HAS BEEN SIMMERING in the fire of protracted ethnic conflict since May 2023. While hundreds have been killed and nearly 60,000 displaced, children have been one of the most affected demographics. From being helpless victims of violent clashes, many are now being sucked into the cycle of violence

that has become the new 'normal' in the hill state.

Multiple media reports since the start of the conflict have been highlighting the utter child rights violations amid the ongoing crisis.

During a recent press conference, Keisham Pradeepkumar, president of the Manipur Commission for Protection of Child Rights (MCPCR), said

the armed groups in Manipur have been recruiting child soldiers, providing them arms training, and inducting them as frontline village defenders.

He further stated that both Meitei and Kuki armed groups have been inducting children. Even Naga armed groups in Manipur have been alleged to be recruiting child soldiers under the apprehension that soon their stronghold villages might be under attack.

The MCPCR added that even though no survey of child soldiers in



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the region has been carried out, there is multiple evidence to substantiate their allegations.

“We have multiple cases on record of child soldiers being used by the armed groups, arrests of minors and schools occupied by insurgents. We have taken multiple empirical data related to dropouts of high school children and related them to the increased arms and drug trades and other such instances to conclude the whopping rate of child soldiers being used. Dropouts are most vulnerable to be recruited as child soldiers.”

An official under the condition of anonymity

A Kuki Students’ Organisation (KSO) leader, who did not wish to be named, added, “At the onset of this conflict in 2023, the schools were closed — and the entire system came to a standstill. There were instances of minors being inducted by the insurgent groups at the time. But after we reopened schools and brought back most of the children to school, such instances reduced drastically”.

The leader further added that village defense committees are led by the village chief, and they have been ensuring that no minors are being inducted. “Even before the conflict, we have instances where parents of 15- or 16-year-old children have approached us to rescue their children who have joined the underground groups. We had talked to those groups, rescued them and admitted them to schools,” he said.

In the same press conference, the MCPCR also appealed to the government to establish two residential schools in every district for the internally displaced children (IDP).

A similar situation has unfolded for years in South Bastar, in Chhattisgarh, which is also simmering in its own decades-long deadly war between the state forces and the Maoists.

In 2024 alone, at least 10 chil-

dren were reported killed in South Bastar — in firings, in encounters, as casualties of accidental blasts of the left-out ammunitions by the state forces, or the improvised explosive devices (IEDs) planted by the Maoists.

At least five children were reported grievously injured in IEDs planted by the Maoists or in cross-firings.

Mangli Sori, a six-month-old infant, was killed in cross-firing at Mudvendi village of Sukma district. She has been reported to be the youngest casualty in the ongoing armed conflict in the region.

Usage of child soldiers by Maoists is also rampant in South Bastar. On 18 April 2024, a 17-year-old child, who was a hardened Left-Wing Extremist (LWE) cadre, was killed in an encounter in the Kanker district of Chhattisgarh which claimed the lives of 29 Maoist cadres.

Months later, an alternate media house reported on three more hardened child soldiers who were killed during the encounter. It has been alleged that the police forces had reported the age of these slain child cadres as “somewhat around 18”.

Bajinath Padda, who was only 15 when he joined the Maoists in 2023, was one of the slain child cadres in this encounter. Padda was 16 when he was killed.

The media house has also identified three similar cases during other encounters in Bastar where the family of the slain cadres identified them as being under the age of 18.

Janilia Naruti was 14 when she joined the Maoists in January 2024, claimed her brother. Her Aadhaar card substantiates his claim. Naruti was also killed during the encounter.

Similarly, as per a report released by the Jammu and Kashmir Police in 2020, around 150 child soldiers were reportedly used by militant organisations there since 2003.

According to the European Foun-

dation for South Asian Studies, while the militant organisations have been recruiting child soldiers, the state agencies have been reluctant to deal with apprehended child soldiers with care. The report mentions that in April 2021, a 14-year-old child was killed during a skirmish with the security forces. In 2023, a 17-year-old child was involved in a militant attack which had killed five security personnel in Kashmir.

The instances of child soldiers’ being used in two-armed conflict-affected regions, Manipur, and the South Bastar, have come to light after India’s certification for having ‘no armed conflict-affected children’ by the UN in June 2023.

The UN report highlighted that India has implemented all its recommendations for the protection of child rights during armed conflicts in J&K. No detailed report on the implementation of the UN’s recommendations by the Indian State is available in the public domain yet. Usage of child soldiers is one of the six grave child rights violations during armed conflicts, as per the UN.

India has been a signatory to the UN’s optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict since 2002. As a signatory of this protocol, the Indian State is legally obliged to ensure that children below the age of 18 years don’t participate in armed conflict-related hostilities, to take proper measures to prevent the recruitment of child soldiers by non-state armed groups, and to ensure proper rehabilitation of apprehended child soldiers.

The newly amended Juvenile Justice Act 2015 also makes it mandatory for the state to ensure that children are protected during armed conflicts.

India has been reluctant to be a signatory to optional protocols of the Geneva Convention which will protect conflict-affected communities but has displayed better adher-

ence to the optional protocol on the protection of children during armed conflicts by substantially reducing the usage of child soldiers in state and state-backed armed forces.

Despite these steps, child rights violations during armed conflicts by both state and non-state armed groups have been rampant in the country.

In an open letter written in 2006, the erstwhile General Secretary of Maoists, Ganapathi, had stated that the minimum age for induction in the Maoist militia is 16 years. He had justified this policy stating that a 16-year-old is no longer a child in an Adivasi village and has been enough politically conscious to be part of the militia.

Rajeev Kumar Bhattacharjee, journalist and author of *'Lens and the Guerrilla: Insurgency in India's Northeast'*, had noted in a paper on the use of child soldiers by the insurgent groups that as per the cultural contexts of multiple rural tribes and communities of the Northeast, a 16-year-old is considered a full-fledged adult, and hence, is rampantly inducted into the armed outfits.

He recalled his meeting with the United Liberation Front of Assam chief Paresh Baruah in 2012 when he confronted the latter upon why the group inducted 16-17-year-olds into its army, Baruah had given a similar justification as the Maoists; that a 16-year-old is no longer a child. He had further added that the minimum age of induction in the American Army is also 17 years.

Bhattacharjee believes that the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) is one of the very few insurgent groups in India whose minimum age for induction in the militia was 21 years. After a continued armed struggle against the Indian State for three decades, all the factions of NDFB disbanded themselves in March 2020.

In December 2024, three children were severely wounded during an encounter between the security forces and Maoists in Bijapur district. As per a media report, the father of one of the wounded children had alleged that security forces had fired on the children without any provocation. The police alleged that the Maoists were using children as shield, resulting in them getting wounded in the cross firing.

A few months back, independent journalist Malini Subramaniam interviewed a mid-rung Maoist leader. She asked him how, despite a Maoist policy on the minimum age for recruitment into the militia being 16 years, were children as young as 14-15-year-old Padda or Naruti (killed in Kanker) inducted, trained in the usage of arms, and involved in an encounter?

The Maoist leader had responded at the time that an internal inquiry had been initiated against the ones who had recruited them.

But the leader was never able to provide a satisfactory answer to questions about how these two underage recruits (also as per the Maoist policy) went unnoticed by other leaders for months after their induction, nor did the Maoist spokesperson issue any press note clarifying the allegations against them.

Kishlay Bhattacharjee, an academician, and journalist, agrees that the state is least bothered about the identification, rescue, and rehabilitation of child soldiers. Being one of the very few journalists to have interviewed Kuki National Organisation leaders just after they had signed the SoO pact in 2008, the scribe notes, "There are no documents on child soldiers with the security forces, the government, or the insurgent outfits either".

As per a report by the Asian Human Rights Commission, multiple instances of child soldiers being used by the Salwa Judum forces were reported from Chhattisgarh

during the early 2000s. The outfit was banned by the Supreme Court in 2011. Even as multiple studies and reports prove it to be a state-backed force, Chhattisgarh, and the Central Ministry of Home Affairs have been in denial.

In Manipur, another KSO leader under the condition of anonymity said that in the wake of the ongoing conflict, the rich and government employees either sent their wards to schools outside the state or admitted them in private schools. But IDPs were left out.

Government schools were recording four times of their enrollment before the conflict. Multiple schools were being used as relief camps. By the months of October and November 2023, KSO had launched the 'Zero - Out Project' which ensured that dropout children are brought back to schools.

Vijay Podiyam (*name changed*) is a 17-year-old child who was inducted as a child soldier in 2019 and was arrested in 2020. After spending two years in a juvenile correctional facility, he was released, upon which, he was admitted to a school in Dantewada district of Bastar. But he had to leave the school as his classmates teased him as 'Naxali'.

There are multiple such instances in South Bastar alone where child soldiers arrested rather than killed during an encounter and trying to reintegrate into society must face repeated discrimination and stigma of Maoism.

A UNICEF report states that between 2005-2022, globally more than 105,000 child soldiers were verified as used by parties to conflict, the actual number of cases is speculated to be much higher.

Vijay Podiyam, Baijnath Padda, or Janilia Naruti, rescued from armed conflict should have a chance at living a life with dignity. □□□

[Source: *The Quint*]

## LETTERS

**Defend the Defenceless**

For those ensnared in the ruthless NRC process, the threat of losing their citizenship is not just a legal ordeal—it is a personal catastrophe. Lives are upended, identities stripped away, and the emotional wounds linger long after the fight.

At Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP), we have been on the frontline for over five years, witnessing this suffering firsthand. Our Assam Team doesn't just provide legal aid—we fight for dignity, for hope, for survival.

**Our efforts include:**

- Providing critical legal aid in foreigners' tribunals and courts.
- Offering counselling and dialogue to bring hope to those in despair.
- Delivering para-legal and direct legal support to individuals and families in need.

The clock is ticking. Lives hang in the balance. We need your help—NOW.

Every contribution ensures that another innocent person is not left defenceless. Stand with us. Act today.

Your support can transform Lives!

**CJP**

**Let Science awaken you (not weaken)**

IIT IIM UPSC NEET. Often the inability of youth to open up their bottled-up feelings to the right person, who can give timely & correct advice, makes them take extreme step.

Teachers and Parents should be trained to spot in students, the warning signs like depression, lack of enthusiasm, sudden withdrawal from friends, their falling grades, low self-esteem and most importantly devote time to listen to their fears and anxieties.

Parents should identify the natural flair of children and allow them to pursue that, instead of pushing them to do things they dislike and try to live their own unrealised dreams through

their children. Children don't behave like stock market to expect return on investment.

Poem I wrote keeping in mind recent Kota IIT craze suicides.

Let Science awaken you (not weaken):

*Let science inspire not per-spire (make you tired)*

*Let science awaken you not weaken you*

*Let science give birth to ideas, not to end life*

*Let science propel you not pressurise you*

*Let science inspire to dream not lead to depression*

*Let science move the scoreboard of life and not stop with score in board (exam)*

*Let science simplify not complicate*

*Let science teach possibilities are infinite, only our limiting beliefs are finite*

*Let science open our hearts and not close our minds.*

**T S Karthik**

**Centre vs Tamil Nadu**

Tamil Nadu's refusal to adopt the three-language formula has irked the Centre. A two-language policy has been in place in Tamil Nadu for decades, and there is no ground to say that it is going to change any time soon. The three-language policy is also not new, and its own record is rather chequered, even in states where it has been in place for a long time. In the Hindi belt of the north, there is no instance of the use of this formula to introduce children to a contemporary language of another state. One can't find even a private school in, say, Uttar or Madhya Pradesh where Punjabi or Tamil has the status of a third language under the haloed formula.

Of course, this is not the whole story of the language "problem". Until quite recently, policy circles in education were acutely aware of the history

of this problem. After Independence, language was perceived as a key factor to be addressed for the goal of national integration. In fact, the history of this perception goes further back. As Independence came closer, the issue became charged with contestation and claims. If India is to have a "national" language, which one will it be? This question was debated in the Constituent Assembly. A related question was that of the official language of the Union government. Neither of the two questions proved simple or easy to resolve. There were no obvious answers, although many leaders of the freedom movement had thought there were. Their attempt to build a consensus was fraught with issues simmering within the language they had assumed to be the answer to India's quest for a national language. Like any other language, Hindi had more than one variety, and the struggle within its politico-literary world was quite intense if not bitter.

The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) had served India since the 1920s to resolve many difficult debates concerning the practice of federal governance in education. This forum has been in disuse over the recent past, and the consequences are now surfacing. In truth CABE was the only formal instrument available for building consensus and keeping everybody in touch with what was happening in education. Reading the archival record of CABE debates is like absorbing the history of the system of education. The solutions that CABE offered were not mandatory or final, but a rare awareness of what will work and what will not.

**Krishna Kumar**

**For Frontier Contact**

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□ □ □

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