

frontier

Vol. 57 : No. 43

ISSN 0016-2094

April 20-26, 2025

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Published weekly for Germinal Publications Pvt. Ltd. by Sharmistha Dutta from 44, Balaram Dey Street, Kolkata-6 and Printed by Abhijit Goswami at Laser Aid, 35A/3, Biplobi Barin Ghosh Sarani, Kolkata-67, West Bengal.

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[Typeset by THE D-COMLASER, 60 Sikdar Bagan Street, Kolkata-4, Ph : 98361-58319]

"Coalition of the (UN) Willing"

EUROPEAN HAWKS GATHERED IN PARIS ON MARCH 27 UNDER the banner of "Coalition of the Willing" to decide on how to help Ukraine in war and in post-war situation. The purpose of the meeting was to assemble a group of countries willing to put boots on the ground and planes in the air to guard the peace between Russia and Ukraine. What was commonly referred to as a peacekeeping force has now been dubbed a "reassurance force" and nobody really knows what form it will take. Or who will command it? After a month and four meetings of coalition partners and warnings from Russia that any troops' presence will be rejected, what consensus emerged from the summit was more forceful condemnation of Russia. There were nearly 30 countries in attendance at the group's Paris meeting, convened by French President Emmanuel Macron. But most of them were mere passengers.

Only Britain and France have publicly promised to put troops on the ground as part of the force and the all important backing of Donald Trump and his top team looks unlikely. So at the end British Prime Minister Keir Starmer says there has been progress, but tangible progress remains elusive. Ukrainians themselves think without American presence no security will be guaranteed even if Britain and France send troops to protect their country. Zelensky said Ukraine was hoping for security guarantee from the US as well as Europe.

With America bypassing them in making a peace deal with Russia they are restless and trying very hard to remain in war games. Even if the war ends, the immediate possibility of which doesn't look bright, tussle over reconstruction business will continue. Originally they mooted the idea of European peace-keeping forces to monitor ceasefire but Washington appeared reluctant. Now they say a British-French military delegation will be sent to Ukraine to scout Kyiv's needs and what can be done to support its army—and, that troops would be deployed as a 'reassurance force' to uphold any ceasefire agreed with Russia. Finally they vowed more ferociously than before to impose tougher sanctions on Russia. In reality they are now fighting over post-war Ukraine. Much depends on Americans whether they will allow Europeans to share the booty.

But sanctions have so far failed to cripple Russian economy. For Moscow sanction came as a blessing in disguise as they opened new channels strengthening multi-polarity. Even Americans now admit that the

days of uni-polar world are over. And the rise of China is a factor which they can hardly ignore anymore. If Trump is showing his eagerness to make a ceasefire agreement in Russia-Ukraine war it is because they want a Sino-Russian split. Trump thinks he could repeat the Nixon strategy in reverse by keeping Russia away from China. But Putin's Russia is not Brezhnev's Soviet Union. Nor is it Gorbachhev's crumbling empire. Being a rising capitalist power with nuclear teeth ideologically and politically Russia is now

more close to China than ever before. In those days the contradiction between Russia and China was antagonistic. In propaganda war Radio Peking's theme song was Soviet social imperialism. It is not the case today. They are in the same boat. Their interests are identical and it is not that easy to un-unite Russia and China at this juncture. Moscow has been able to fight the adverse impact of sanctions because of China's unwavering support to Russia. Shortly before the third anniversary of Russia-Ukraine war, Xi reaffirmed

Beijing's "no limits" partnership with Moscow in a video call with Putin, hours after Trump's second inauguration in January.

For one thing Putin has not only restored the country's military might but redefined its global identity. No western power thought Russia would bounce back after post-Soviet chaos. And it is their main concern today. Their agony is multiplying with Trump's America withdrawing from Europe at least partially affecting their economy in no minor ways as Trump's tariff war shows. □□□

COMMENT

What is Uniform about UCC?

WITH DUE RESPECT TO IMPORTANCE being accorded to the Uniform Civil Code Act, 2024 having been formally implemented in Uttarakhand and apparently considered so politically in states with Bharatiya Janata Power (BJP) in power, one is prompted to deliberate upon its "uniformity" and the manner in which hype appears to be raised about it. First, even in Uttarakhand, it is not binding on all Indians as it does not apply to members of Scheduled Tribes.

Besides, one may draw attention to the manner to which certain political and social messages regarding this code have been and are being spread. One of these is its emphasis on minimum marriageable age – with 18 years for women and 21 for men. While asserting this point, the

messages draw attention to preventing marriages among younger girls belonging to a minority community. One may draw attention to the reality that marriages taking place of girls at younger than 18 years is hardly decided by their religious community. Rather, it seems to be decided by their educational status, economic background, their rural/urban residence and several cultural issues which seem to be common for most choosing to get their daughters married at a young age. It would be great if some attention is paid to specifying the "uniformity" of this point—regarding marriageable age—in messages being spread about this code.

Where polygamy is concerned, perhaps some attention should be paid to it at a "uniform level." After all, Uniform Civil Code Act, 2024 is supposed to bear the same importance for all in the country. Now, there are a few points in that having been formally included in Uttarakhand which seem hardly applicable in other parts of the country.

The preceding question may also be raised with regard to points laid

out about live-in relationships in Uttarakhand UCC. It mandates registration of these relationships, so that they gain legal recognition. Given that there is no reference to whether a married person can register a live-in relationship with someone else, whether the same would be permitted or not, this seems equivalent to perhaps leaving a loophole for a person to have relationships with two persons, one as married and other as live-in. This would be equivalent to allowing legal status to both. Neither is there any reference to how many live-in relationships can a person have?

Besides, it is well known that in quite a few cities, live-in relationships have begun being practised quite openly.

In addition, if even a section of society is exempt from UCC, how can it be viewed as Uniform? Besides, as evident, Uttarakhand has implemented it in keeping with apparently points it seems as most pertinent. But then if each state chooses to do so, there would probably as many versions of UCC as there are states. Prospects of other states not giving the same importance to points which Uttarakhand has cannot be side-lined? So what really is Uniform about UCC? □□□

[Contributed by Nilofar Suhrawardy]

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NOTE

Stateless in Their Own Country

Kirity Roy writes:

EAST SAHEBGANJ IS A small village on the Indo-Bangladesh border in Coochbehar district where 7 families, comprising around 30 individuals, have been residing for generations. The entire village is enclosed by barbed wire fencing, cutting it off from the mainland. Despite being Indian citizens, these people live under conditions worse than prisoners, as their every movement is controlled and dictated by the BSF.

The village falls under the jurisdiction of Purba Sahebganj B.O.P, D Company, 129 BN BSF, and has only one entry-exit point, Gate No. 6—which is opened for extremely limited periods

During these restricted time slots, villagers are expected to manage all their essential activities, including buying food, selling crops, accessing healthcare, and meeting any other needs. If someone fails to return before the gate closes, they are left stranded outside, sometimes forced to spend the whole night in extreme

hardship. The relatives of those people do not even have the liberty to visit their homes from nearby towns without seeking permission from BSF officers, which often involves days of pleading and humiliation.

The villagers of East Sahebganj (Netaji Bajar Part), have been living in this land for generations, yet they are treated as stateless people within their own country. When the border fencing was built, they had no land elsewhere in India to relocate to. Consequently, they were left trapped in an unlivable space, their land turning into a burden rather than an asset.

The suffering of East Sahebganj villagers constitutes gross violations of multiple constitutional and human rights, including:

Right to Freedom of Movement (Article 19(1)(d)) ; Right to Livelihood (Article 21); Right to Life and Dignity (Article 21); Right to Trade and Occupation (Article 19(1)(g)); Right Against Exploitation (Article 23).

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The people of East Sahebganj are not criminals, smugglers, or threats to national security. They are citizens of India, deserving dignity, rights, and freedom. The NHRC must intervene urgently to restore justice and protect these marginalised citizens from further suffering.

□□□

TRUMP'S AMERICA

The Assault on Knowledge

Vinod Mubayi

ALL FASCIST AND PROTO-fascist regimes begin with an attack on knowledge and on the institutions whose stated *raison d'être* is to develop, nurture, and advance knowledge. The Trump administration's assault on leading US universities and, in particular, their students and faculty who happen to oppose US government policies falls squarely in this tradition. In addition, Trump and his cohorts that

he has empowered are busy trashing parts of the government that deal with regulatory policy, health sciences and environmental protection. Thus, the areas of knowledge that Trump and his cohorts are attacking range from science to history to social issues, economics, and politics. The focus of the attacks is knowledge professionals, typically college/university faculty and students, government scientists and related

technical staff who analyze and present to the public any set of facts, analyses or arguments that can call into question Trump's policies or hamper and hinder his or his cronies' business interests and wealth. As is typical of authoritarian regimes, repressive and punitive measures that ignore constitutional niceties like freedom of speech and include massive firing of government employees have been adopted to intimidate and create a climate of fear to silence any dissent and opposing views.

All these measures have been on display in the US in the past eight

weeks since Trump was inaugurated on January 20. Three particular areas of concern where the assaults have been particularly fierce can be highlighted. The first one is related to politics, specifically the expression of any pro-Palestine views where criticism of Israeli state policies is dubbed as antisemitism, particularly on university campuses after October 7, 2023. The second is climate change denial where the Trump administration is laying off hundreds of meteorologists and other climate scientists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the premier US agency for studying climate. The third is the planned emasculation if not elimination of the office of research and development of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the firing of over a thousand environmental scientists, toxicologists, and related personnel responsible for establishing the science underlying enforcement of environmental regulation.

Since the US is the main supporter of Israel and the supplier of most of its bombs and other military hardware it is deeply complicit in the Israeli military's wanton killing of Palestinian civilians, many of them women and children, in Gaza. This is why criticism of Israel's barbaric actions is labelled by the US government as "antisemitism" as if critiquing the policies and actions of the government of the state of Israel is tantamount to discriminating against the religion of Judaism or its adherents. This was true during the Biden Administration but has gone much

further after Trump assumed power. Assaults on free speech, whether of students or faculty, in the context of criticism directed at Israel for its genocide of Palestinians in Gaza have targeted non-citizens in particular for several reasons. They are more vulnerable being subject to the threat of deportation and, in the minds of the MAGA cult followers, can be linked to the anti-immigrant rhetoric of Trump to cleanse America of millions of unwanted "aliens".

Columbia University in New York has been kind of Ground Zero since November 2023 for the assault on students protesting the slaughter in Palestine. Columbia is located in the global media capital that is also home to the nation's largest Jewish population and for several decades it has been a centre of conflict between defenders and critics of Israel that was highlighted recently by the blatantly illegal arrest without charges of a graduate student of Palestinian ancestry Mahmoud Khalil who has permanent legal residence in the US as a holder of a green card and is married to an American citizen. The Nation magazine wrote that "what is happening to Khalil has been enabled at every turn by...Columbia University, which has consistently failed to defend basic academic freedom since the Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023...with Khalil's arrest, Columbia has become the Trump administration's test case for the largest assault on American higher education since the McCarthy era."

Khalil was taken into custody in Manhattan by Dept of Homeland Security agents and then flown to a jail in Louisiana over a thousand miles away, slated for deportation under an obscure 1952 law passed at the height of the anti-communist McCarthy era that allows the government to deport those considered a threat to US foreign policy. While a federal judge has blocked the gov-

ernment from carrying out its threat before a hearing, Khalil's future is uncertain. Prof. Nadia Abou El-Haj, a long time tenured professor at Barnard College of Columbia University, states: "Let us be clear: Mahmoud has been abducted and detained for his political speech. It is political speech that some of our colleagues and students—together with Zionist organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League, the Jewish Federations of North America, and Canary Mission—do not like. This is political speech that makes them not just uncomfortable but enraged. Over and over again, they have harnessed that rage to paint pro-Palestinian politics as anti-Semitic, even as providing material support for terrorism, with no evidence to back up the claim."

Another graduate student at Columbia of Indian origin who held a student visa, Ranjini Srinivasan, and who, somewhat unwittingly, got caught up in the Palestine protests last spring, had her student visa cancelled under vague charges of supporting Hamas. She decided to leave the US on her own accord and take shelter in Canada.

On March 7, the US government cancelled 400 million dollars of funding at Columbia in various scientific departments and on March 13 it sent to Columbia what the distinguished retired professor of Sanskrit and South Asian studies at Columbia Prof Sheldon Pollock termed "a ransom note." Writing in the Guardian newspaper on March 19, Prof Pollock said "Like a mob boss, the government threatens to cut off two of the university's fingers: academic freedom and faculty governance." As a precondition for even discussing the restoration of the cancelled funds, the Trump administration made an extraordinary demand, unprecedented in the annals of academic governance, that Columbia

For **Frontier Contact**

DHYANBINDU
COLLEGE SQUARE

put one particular academic department, Middle East, South Asian and African studies, Mesaas, into “receivership.” Pollock, who was once chaired Mesaas, characterized this demand as an “unparalleled attempt to seize control over people and ideas in a US university.” In his view, this department was singled out “because its faculty have not voiced steadfast support for the state of Israel in their scholarship...Mesaas professors ask hard but entirely legitimate questions about Israel—and our government wants to ban that.”

The Trump administration gave Columbia until March 20 to accept its demands or else and Columbia meekly capitulated. In a text message, Prof Pollock stated that “Columbia faculty are utterly shocked and profoundly disappointed by the trustees’ capitulation to the extortionate behaviour of the federal government.” He said “This is a shameful day in the history of Columbia,” adding that it would “endanger academic freedom, faculty governance and the excellence of the American university system.” Professor Katherine Franke, who lost her position at Columbia University’s law school after 25 years for defending Columbia students’ right to protest in favor of a ceasefire in the Israeli military assault in Gaza and for Columbia University to divest from Israel, surmised that the reason for Columbia’s easy capitulation is that “the boards of trustees are no longer made up of people who are involved in education, committed to the educational mission, in some way professionally or otherwise...Instead, they are hedge fund managers, venture capitalists, corporate lawyers, and in our case, arms manufacturers as well. And they see that responsibility is to protect only the endowment.” Indeed, two on Columbia’s board of trustees have close business relationships with Israel as well.

And what is true of Columbia

applies to other elite academic universities as well as the following examples make clear.

Helyeh Doutaghi, a scholar of international law and geopolitical economy at Yale University was notified on March 3 about an online report in an obscure AI-powered right-wing Zionist platform called “Jewish Onliner” that falsely accused her of being a “terrorist” since she had criticized Israel’s genocide in Palestine. Rather than defend her, the Yale Law School moved within less than 24 hours of learning about the report to place her on leave. Without investigating the source of the allegations first, the nation’s “top law school” accepted them at face value, and shifted the burden of proof from the accuser to the accused, treating her, prima facie, as guilty until proven otherwise.

A couple of weeks ago, the Trump administration deported Brown University assistant professor and surgeon Rasha Alawieh to Lebanon. Alawieh has a valid H-1B visa and has lived in the U.S. since 2018, where she finished her medical certification. Alawieh was traveling back to the U.S. from her home country of Lebanon, where she was visiting family last month, when officials detained her “without any justification,” denying her access to legal counsel at Boston Logan International Airport. The U S District Court in Massachusetts ordered her not to be removed without at least 48 hours’ notice while the judge considered her case — but officials deported her anyway. The only reason cited for Alawieh’s deportation is that she attended a funeral while in Lebanon of someone the US Govt considered “suspicious.”

Meanwhile on March 17, Dr Badar Khan Suri, an Indian citizen on a J-1 exchange visitor visa who is a postdoctoral fellow in peace and conflict studies at Georgetown Uni-

versity, was arrested by DHS agents and transferred to an ICE facility in Louisiana. His only sin apparently is that he is married to an American citizen of Palestinian descent whose father once worked for the government in Gaza.

The common thread in all these stories is the activity of extreme right-wing Jewish organizations in the US like AIPAC and ADL who are targeting any expressions of pro-Palestinian speech on university campuses. Their demands are conveyed to the Trump administration which then acts to deport foreign students who are non-US citizens. Several Jewish organizations such as Jewish Voice for Peace and Not in Our Name have strongly opposed the Israeli genocide and their members have been harassed and arrested by the police and suffered expulsion from colleges. However, since they are US citizens they cannot be arrested by ICE and deported unlike foreign students.

Apart from academia, scientists in government agencies and funding institutions have become targets of Trump’s cohorts as well.

Trump and his followers have frequently trashed the well-established science of climate change. To demonstrate that they mean business, hundreds of weather forecasters and other federal NOAA employees on probationary status were fired a few weeks ago. These included meteorologists who do crucial local forecasts in the national weather service offices. Since NOAA’s observations, expertise, and models play a vital role in global climate forecasts, many

foreign governments such as India

For **Frontier Contact**

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are worried about developments at NOAA. Climate scientist at the Indian Institute for Tropical Meteorology Roxy Mathew Koll termed the NOAA layoffs as a global crisis that could impact climate science. NOAA provides data and models that support weather-climate monitoring, forecasting and disaster preparedness worldwide. Especially for India, the monsoon forecasts, cyclone tracking, and climate projections rely on NOAA's models. Trump is also removing all restraints on fossil fuel production that are bound to negatively impact global warming.

EPA plans to eliminate its scientific research arm, by removing over a thousand chemists, biologists, toxicologists and other scientists. In their plans to shrink the federal government, the newly appointed EPA administrator has stated to wants to reduce his agency's budget by 65 percent. Undoubtedly, this drastic reduction will have a very negative impact on environmental regulation to provide clean water, monitor air quality and clean up toxic chemicals. As reported by the New York Times, the E.P.A.'s plan calls for

dissolving the agency's largest department, the Office of Research and Development, and purging up to 75 percent of the people who work there. This office provides "the independent research that undergirds virtually all of the agency's environmental policies, from analyzing the risks of "forever chemicals" in drinking water to determining the best way to reduce fine particle pollution in the atmosphere". Eliminating this office would clearly undercut the regulation of polluting industries.

Changes are also affecting the working of the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Science Foundations, the agencies responsible for making and managing budgetary allocations for scientific research in many fields. The newly appointed chief of the Health and Human Services Department that oversees NIH is a crank who does not believe in vaccines. It is reported that NIH officials have warned researchers not to mention mRNA vaccines in their grant applications, as this Nobel-prizewinning technology has been the subject of conspiracy theories that have gained

traction among the Trump administration and its supporters.

The politics behind the assault on science can be traced to a project of the conservative Heritage Foundation called Project 2025, a report calling for the reconstruction of the American state that has become a kind of blueprint for the actions of the Trump administration and its coterie of hedge fund investors and other business tycoons with ties to the fossil fuel and chemical industries, real estate and Silicon Valley venture capitalists from where Elon Musk emerged.

Education and learning and science are about critical thinking and subjecting power and dogma to truth by asking questions and challenging accepted narratives. Every authoritarian regime seeks to control what people think via its school curriculum and book bans, by controlling who teaches and what they teach. The Donald Trumps, Victor Orbans, Narendra Modis, and Recep Erdogans of this world hate intellectuals who dissent and ask challenging questions that expose the bankruptcy of the leaders. □□□

ON THE EVE OF MAY DAY

Ambedkar on Parliamentary Democracy

Ramakrishnan

PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY is in reality a government of a hereditary subject class by a hereditary ruling class.

That is part of a prepared speech of Ambedkar at All India Trade Union Workers Study Camp held in Delhi, Sep 1943 under the auspices of the *Indian Federation of Labour*. It is least cited, even by the severe critics of parliamentary democracy.

Ambedkar's political views and experiments varied over time: He established Independent Labour Party in August, 1936, obviously not lim-

ited to SCs. That was replaced on 19th July, 1942, with the AISC which he dissolved on 14th October 1956 at Nagpur and announced the formation of RPI, for which he drafted a constitution before he died. RPI came into existence on 3 October, 1957.

In his opening remarks of this 1943 speech, Ambedkar said: "as the autocracy of Despotic Sovereigns was replaced after a long and bloody struggle by a system known as Parliamentary Democracy (PD in short), it was felt that this was the

last word in the frame of Govt. It was believed to bring about the millennium in which every human being will have the right to liberty, property and pursuit of happiness. It is therefore a matter of surprise that there has been a revolt against PD although not even a century has elapsed since its universal acceptance and inauguration".

"I have no doubt that what has ruined PD is the idea of Freedom of Contract. PD took no notice of economic inequalities and did not care to examine the result of freedom of contract on the parties to the contract should they happen to be unequal. It did not mind if the freedom of contract gave the strong the opportunity to defraud the weak.

The result is that PD in standing out as protagonist of liberty has continuously added to the economic wrongs of the poor, the downtrodden and the disinherited classes”.

And adds: “Democracy is another name for equality. PD developed a passion for liberty. It never made even a nodding acquaintance with equality. It failed to realise the significance of equality, and did not even endeavour to strike a balance between liberty and equality, with the result that liberty swallowed equality and has left a progeny of inequities”.

(In reality, in post-1947 India, even liberty remains a mirage, it disappears the moment rights are sought to be exercised by toiling classes and their supporters.)

Ambedkar further said: “All political societies get divided into two classes – the rulers and the ruled...If the evil stopped here it would not matter much. But the unfortunate part of it is that the division becomes stereotyped and stratified so much so that the Rulers are always drawn from the ruling class and the class of ruled never becomes the Ruling Class. People do not govern themselves; they establish a govt and leave it to govern them, forgetting that it is not their govt. That being the situation, PD has never been a govt of the people or by the people and that is why it has never been a govt for the people. Notwithstanding the paraphernalia of a popular govt, PD is in reality a govt of a hereditary subject class by a hereditary ruling class.”

Ambedkar further advises the oppressed classes:

“In the first place, they have shown most appalling indifference to the effect of the economic factor in the making of men’s life. The labouring class far from being fat like pigs are starving, and one wishes that they thought of bread first and everything else afterwards ...The

labouring classes failed to acquaint themselves with literature dealing with the govt of mankind. Everyone from the labouring classes should be acquainted with Rousseau’s Social Contract, Marx’s Communist Manifesto, Pope Leo XIII’s Encyclical on the conditions of labour and John Stuart’s Mill On Liberty, to mention only four of the basic programmatic documents on social and governmental organisation of modern times. But the labouring classes will not give them the attention they deserve. Instead, labour has taken delight reading false and fabulous stories of ancient Kings and Queens and has become addicted to it”.

“There is another and bigger crime which they have committed against themselves. They have developed no ambition to capture govt, and are not even convinced of the necessity of controlling govt as a necessary means of safeguarding their interests. Indeed they are not even interested in govt”. “It would be a great mistake to suppose that Trade Unions are a panacea for all the ills of labour”. Compare this statement with the Communist Manifesto: “The first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle for democracy”.

Perhaps, he had thought UK’s PD was an exotic plant for a feudal India that would lead to a hereditary ruling class. Now India has a semi-feudal, semi-colonial hybrid democracy, funded by a big business that is a junior partner of imperialism so that it better serves the latter.

The above views of Ambedkar are rooted in UK’s Fabian Socialism and Labour politics of the day, one phase in his political life, even as Ambedkar the politician evolved and changed.

Quota to the minorities is now hot in the polity. “Does it mean that you would steal from the rights

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(quota) of Dalits, STs, and OBCs?” Thus Modi invoked Ambedkar to woo them all and to pitch them up against Muslims. This does not mean, Sangh pariwar will always oppose reservation for Muslims. Electoral considerations decide: In BJP-ruled MP, reservation for more than a dozen OBC Muslim castes has been in operation; so also in Rajasthan. Karnataka’s former BJP CM Yeddyurappa assured he would not abolish reservation for dozens of Muslim castes that existed for decades. The Union govt allows it for Muslim OBCs. So also NDA-ruled states like AP, Maharashtra. Modi argued: “Is it not an insult to the Constitution, and to Ambedkar?” There was religion-based communal representation, BJP needs to be reminded, in Constituent assembly itself: There were representatives, besides Hindus, of Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, of SCs. Thus it had no people’s mandate, and no sovereignty. See how ingeniously RSS Chief quoted, not wrongly, Ambedkar. Mohan Bhagwat, in his 2018 Vijayadashami speech said: Ambedkar had stressed there can be no justification for unconstitutional methods, which were “nothing but the Grammar of Anarchy”.

Ambedkar indeed said: “.hold fast to constitutional methods.. It means we must abandon the bloody methods of revolution, we must

abandon the method of civil disobedience, non-cooperation and satyagraha... But where constitutional methods are open, there can be no justification for these unconstitutional methods. These methods are nothing but the Grammar of Anarchy and the sooner they are abandoned, the better for us.”(in Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949).

Now one can see better why Sangh parivar opted to celebrate the Constitution Day. Indira Gandhi had invoked Ambedkar’s Constitution for her Emergency (1975-76), and the Supreme Court upheld it. Thus there is need to re-study and recalibrate Ambedkar.

Ambedkar was not allowed to be elected as a member of the Constituent Assembly (in 1946) by the ruling classes of the day. He could enter the House only from the Eastern Bengal thanks to the support of GS Mondal, of Bengal’s SC Federation, supplemented by Muslim League. And with 1947 partition, he lost his seat. Then he was co-opted, also into Nehru’s Cabinet, along with Shyama Prasad Mukherjee.

Ambedkar did not like being co-opted, and was keen that he should get elected to the Lok Sabha in 1952. But the ‘architect’ was defeated by a margin of 14000 votes by a Congress candidate, in a reserved seat. Upset and shocked, his wife and colleagues lobbied for him and he was in Rajya Sabha. There came a by-election to Lok Sabha in 1954 May; he contested and was defeated again. That humiliation he swallowed: He continued in the Cabinet until he resigned later. Unless one surrenders or compromises with ruling classes as well as principles, no sincere candidate can win elections in today’s India. This is one take-away from Ambedkar’s electoral experience.

The Constituent Assembly was

‘conceived’ and ‘elected’ in 1946, under the much-despised, Government of India Act 1935: There was no universal, adult franchise; less than 10 % of the population were voters: a certain level of tax-payers, those highly educated, those deputed by the princes. ‘We the people of India’ was an empty claim. Even those elite were not sovereign; they were subjects, many of them henchmen, of a colonial regime.

Many eulogise the “Indian” Constitution and Ambedkar as its great “architect”. Both are falsehoods, the ruling classes present to the gullible. The “Chief draftsman” was SN Mukherjee, and the drafting committee had a British-nominated Advisor sitting on its head, BN Rao, ICS, expert in (British) Constitutional Law. In his 1949 Nov speech, he acknowledged their original drafts, and other contributors. He was only a Drafting Committee Member and the Chairman of a 7-member Drafting Committee, that worked from 1947 August 29 to 1950 January 24, which would do the necessary word-smithy as decided by the Constituent Assembly that was NOT founded on a democratic basis. The draft itself was overwhelmingly borrowed – often copied almost verbatim (at least 250 Articles were thus taken from 1935) from the Act of 1935, described by Nehru as a “charter of bondage”. The 1935 Act in turn had been borrowed from that of 1919. Cooperation with 1935 Act would amount to a “betrayal”, the AICC had said in a Resolution. Then there were clauses borrowed from France (ideas of liberty), from Ireland (Directive Principles), from Japan (Acts related to Supreme Court), from Russia (planning-related), from US, and then May’s Parliamentary practices of UK. One renowned expert had said: The Constitution was prepared after “ransacking all the known constitutions

of the world”. The end product was a “beautiful patchwork”, said one Member in the House (Durgadas vol-2, p. 613-616). It was a “slavish imitation of the west” said another. CWC Member Sarat Chandra Bose had said: The very Preamble was conceived in “fraud”. A popular cinema-song of Nehru era (Mera Joota hai Japani ... phir bhi Dil hai Hindustani, or something like that) perhaps was a reflection of this admixture.

He revealed his mind and the reality in bitter words in the parliament itself, in Rajya Sabha Sep 2, 1953. Ambedkar said: “People always keep saying to me: ‘Oh, you are the maker of the Constitution’. ‘My answer is I was a hack. What I was asked to do, I did much against my will.’ (Oxford Dictionary says ‘hack’ is ‘a person hired to do dull routine work.’)

Then a Member said: “But you defended it.” Ambedkar shot back: “We lawyers defend many things.” The then Home Minister Katju said Ambedkar was responsible for drafting the Constitution. “You want to accuse me of your blemishes?” Ambedkar later added: “Sir, my friends tell me that I have made the Constitution. But I am quite prepared to say that I shall be the first person to burn it out. I do not want it. It does not suit anybody.” (Biography by Dhanajay Keer, seen by Ambedkar before publication, mentions this).

Ambedkar by 1955 was indeed highly disappointed and demoralised, no doubt by the electoral defeats, but that was only one factor. He was physically ailing, and emotionally wailing for more than a year before his death. He poured out his anguish in one of his last major political speeches (18th March, 1956) at Agra. “So far this speech was available in Hindi only. I have translated it into English,” wrote SR

Darapuri, a retired IGP, an IPS officer, a Dalit activist from UP. In a brief but telling intro to the speech, he wrote: “Today Dalit society has moved away from Dr Ambedkar’s agenda of annihilation of caste.. and is infected with caste divisions. It appears that caravan of Babasaheb is moving backward..” We can recall a few lines, from that translation, to size up the reality, more relevant today than ever:

“To Government Servants: Some persons have reached high posts after getting education. But these educated persons have betrayed me. I expected that they would do social service after getting higher education. But what I see is a crowd of

small and big clerks who are busy in filling their own bellies...”

Despite reservations for decades, Anand Teltumbde writes: “If one looks at the profile of Dalits as the predominantly (81 percent) rural people, linked with land as landless labourers and marginal farmers with a small (19 percent) section living in urban areas, a large part of which lives in slums and works in informal sectors, one surely finds that the historical Dalit discourse revolving around reservation has always been unrelated with the majority of people, because it was articulated by upwardly mobile urbanite Dalits... More recently, after a deeper study for his latest book, Republic of Caste

(Navayana 2018) Teltumbde went deeper into the question, in the Book Release function, reported as Reservations are not a measure of justice: Anand Teltumbde.

Ambedkar had himself called for the abolition of reservations for elections to Legislatures both in states and at the Centre. Very few mention this fact. This he did in a speech he made at the All India Conference of SC Federation on Dec 27, 1955. In fact the Conference passed a resolution to that effect. □□□

(This is an abridged and modified version of an article published in countercurrents.org. All emphases added. Thanks to Dr KS Sharma, for his research.)

FILM SANTOSH

Portrayal of Police Brutality

Hannah Ellis-Petersen

INDIAN FILM CENSORS HAVE blocked the release of critically acclaimed film Santosh over concerns about its portrayal of misogyny, Islamophobia and violence in the Indian police force.

Santosh, written and directed by British-Indian filmmaker Sandhya Suri, is set in north India and has won international plaudits for its portrayal of a young widow who joins the police force and investigates the murder of a young Dalit girl.

The film is an unflinching fictional portrayal of the murkier elements of the Indian police force, depicting deep-rooted misogyny, discrimination against Dalits—the lowest caste in India previously known as untouchables—and the normalisation of mistreatment and torture by police officers. The film also grapples with the issue of sexual violence in India, particularly against lower caste women, and the rising tide of anti-Muslim prejudice in the country.

Santosh made its debut at

Cannes film festival to widespread acclaim. It was the UK’s official entry for the Oscars’ international feature category and went on to be nominated for a Bafta for best debut feature this year, as well as receiving glowing reviews, including five stars in the Observer, which called it a “phenomenal achievement”. Its lead actor, Shahana Goswami, recently won best actress at the Asian film awards

The film was made in India, has an entirely Indian cast and is all in Hindi, the dominant language of north India. The filmmakers had previously submitted the script in order to film in India and had faced no issues. India’s largest cinema chain was also on board to distribute the film in January.

However, Indian audiences are unlikely to ever be able to see it in cinemas after censors on the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), a government body which approves all cinematic releases, refused to do

so for Santosh over concerns about its negative portrayal of the police.

Suri, the film’s writer and director, described the decision by the censors as “disappointing and heart-breaking”.

“It was surprising for all of us because I didn’t feel that these issues were particularly new to Indian cinema or hadn’t been raised before by other films,” she said.

Suri said the censors had demanded a list of radical cuts so lengthy and wide-ranging that they would be “impossible” to implement. Legal restrictions prevented her sharing exact details of the censor’s demands, but she said that the list of cuts was so long it had gone on for several pages, and included concerns about themes relating to police conduct and wider societal problems which are deeply baked into the film.

“It was very important to me that the film is released in India so I did try to figure out if there was a way to make it work,” said Suri. “But in the end it was just too difficult to make those cuts and have a film that still made sense, let alone stayed true to its vision.”

Suri emphasised that while the film offered an uncompromising depiction of the police, “I don’t feel my film glorifies violence in a way that many other films focusing on the police have done. There’s nothing sensationalist about it.”

The decision by the censorship board comes at a time when India’s cultural sphere is seen to be more heavily policed than ever, with films and TV series dealing with politically sensitive themes often targeted with hate campaigns and police cases, or dropped by streaming platforms before they are released.

Suri admitted she had been “nervous” about releasing the film in India in the current climate but insisted it was “vitally important” for her that the very people affected by the issues in the film were able to

see it. It was the incident in 2012 of a woman raped on a bus in Delhi, commonly known as the Nirbhaya case, that had initially inspired her to make the film and she had collaborated with Indian non-government organisations when building up the story.

Police violence and torture is a well-documented issue in India. According to a 2020 Human Rights Watch report, police in India routinely use torture and flout arrest procedures with little or no accountability.

Depictions of police violence have also previously appeared in Indian cinema but Suri questioned whether the highly realistic depictions in *Santosh*—as opposed to the often stylised format of Bollywood and other Indian film industries—had caused discomfort among the censors.

“Maybe there’s something about this film which is troubling in that everybody is morally compromised and there is no single hero,” she said. “I think that’s what might set it apart from other stories in Indian cinema which often show a maverick cop in a rotten system.”

No Indian police figures have responded to coverage of the film, which is set in a fictional north Indian town. The CBFC have been contacted for comment.

There is no appeals process or negotiation allowed with the CBFC once their report is submitted and the matter can be contested only in court. However, Suri said she would still keep fighting to have the film available to Indian audiences. □□□

[Santosh is currently on release in UK cinemas. Courtesy: The Guardian]

THREE-LANGUAGE FORMULA

Battle against ‘Hindi Imposition’

Ramachandra Guha

THE WAR OF WORDS BETWEEN politicians of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and politicians of the Bharatiya Janata Party has been represented in the press as a battle between two languages, Tamil and Hindi. That description is not inaccurate, yet it is incomplete. For, at a deeper level, the debate represents two very different ideas of India: one that welcomes diversity and difference in culture as well as in politics, and the other whose unspoken motto is “Standardise, Homogenise, and Centralise”.

The opposition to Hindi imposition in Tamil Nadu goes back a long way, to the late 1930s, when a Congress government in what was then the Madras Presidency chose to make Hindi teaching compulsory in schools, albeit in stages. Ironically, the prime minister (as the

nomenclature then ran) of Madras at the time, C Rajagopalachari, later radically changed his position.

By the 1950s, he began arguing, just as Tamil politicians do now, that if a second language was to be taught in addition to one’s mother tongue, this should be English, rather than Hindi. To those (such as Ram Manohar Lohia) who disparaged English as an alien tongue associated with the colonisers, Rajaji responded that English had become an entirely Indian language, indigenised in practice.

In 1965, Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri sought afresh to impose Hindi by making it, instead of English, the language in which the Centre and the states communicated with one another. This sparked massive protests in Madras state, taken advantage of by what had now become the major Opposition

party in the state, the DMK. Shastri withdrew the offending order; nonetheless, the Congress suffered such reputational damage that it lost power in a state whose politics it had long dominated. Since 1967, it has been only one of the two Dravidian parties that have been in power in Tamil Nadu.

MK Stalin and his advisers surely know this history. They calculate that just as the opposition to Hindi once vanquished the dominant political party of the 1960s, so likewise it could keep at bay the dominant political party of today. The BJP is desperate to make inroads into Tamil Nadu. Consider the “Kashi Tamil Sangamams” so assiduously promoted by Narendra Modi, the spectacle of a *sengol* being installed in the new Parliament building, and the resources spent by the party’s top brass in building up a former IPS officer as the Hindutva redeemer of Tamil Nadu and so on.

The DMK’s stoking of the language debate makes electoral sense, yet it also draws on a deep reservoir

of Tamil pride. This has several dimensions: *cultural*, the fact that their language is even older than Sanskrit and has produced equally imperishable literature; *social*, that movements against caste and gender discrimination began earlier and have had much more visible impact here than in the states of the Hindi heartland; and, not least, *economic*, that Tamil Nadu is far more industrialised and with a far higher *per capita* income than the states of the Hindi heartland.

It is important to stress that these sentiments are widely shared among Tamils, and by no means restricted to supporters of the DMK. The Tamils have their self-respect as much as the Gujaratis have their *asmita*.

Tamil Nadu's opposition to Hindi imposition is based on politics and on culture. Yet it is also consistent with the spirit of the Constitution as it was originally envisaged. For, until 1976, education was a state subject; it was only under the Emergency that it was shifted to the Concurrent List. It is that arbitrary act, carried out under authoritarian rule, which is now being invoked by the Union government to bully the Tamil Nadu government to fall in line, threatening to withdraw funds due to the state unless it follows New Delhi's diktats.

Those who oppose Tamil Nadu's stand refer to what is called the "three-language formula" recommended by various Commissions over the years. This proposed that along with the mother tongue and English, a third language such as Hindi could be taught. However, in practice, the third language in Hindi-speaking states has almost always been Sanskrit. There is no record of government schools in UP or Bihar choosing to have Tamil or Kannada or Bangla or Odia or Malayalam as their third language, nor even Marathi or Gujarati.

Where other states adopted the formula, Tamil Nadu did not. How it has turned out in practice appears to bear out their reservations. For, far from promoting national integration, the three-language formula has been an unwitting tool of State-sponsored Hindi expansionism. It is precisely for this reason that the current regime promotes it. Though the prime minister has been silent on the subject, the home minister has often insisted that Hindi, and Hindi alone, must be the language of communication among the people of different states. He has also made his dislike of Indians choosing to speak in English known.

For about half a century, from 1965 to 2014, the Union government did not actively promote Hindi across the vast, non-Hindi-speaking parts of the country. Yet, the language spread nonetheless, through inter-state migration and, more significantly, through the medium of film and television. It helped that the Hindi of the Bombay film industry and TV serials was a supple, colloquial Hindustani, not the stiff, formalised, excessively Sanskritised Hindi of All India Radio and State propaganda.

Speaking in Kerala last month, Mohan Bhagwat asked Hindus to shun English. Like Lohia once did, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief considers English to be the language of Anglicised elite whose minds are colonised. He hopes that the language would soon be banished from India. Yet it has not. Particularly since the 1990s, English has spread rapidly, and again through means other than State patronage. The software boom, which was brought about only because India's leading engineering colleges taught in English, had much to do with this. English now became identified as the language of social mobility and professional advancement, as a

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window to a larger and more capacious world.

For many years now, the brilliant thinker, Chandra Bhan Prasad, has argued that Dalits must learn English to get entry into modern professions where they were presently underrepresented. He quoted Dr BR Ambedkar as saying that “English was the milk of a lioness, only those who drink it will roar.” When prominent Kannada writers, in a fit of linguistic pride, asked that English not be taught in schools, Dalit intellectuals responded: ‘first you denied us Sanskrit, now you deny us English—all to keep your (upper-caste) privilege intact’.

In this manner, in the decades

before Narendra Modi came to power, *both* Hindi and English began to be known more widely across India – even if the many more Indians who now understood one or both of these languages did not read or speak them with felicity or precision. This growing embrace of Hindi by non-Hindi speakers and of English by Indians was, it must be stressed, *voluntary and spontaneous*. And it had a salutary effect on the country: politically, culturally, and not least, economically.

Tragically, rather than allow this organic process to evolve further, the sangh parivar wishes to use the power of the state to subtly diminish English and aggressively promote Hindi.

This comes from their narrow-minded and even paranoid belief that just as only Hindus are the natural and authentic citizens of India, in the sphere of language only Hindi can serve as the cement of national unity.

However, independent India was built and nurtured through its embrace of religious *and* of linguistic pluralism. No religion was meant to be superior to another, either in theory or in practice and no language either. It is in this context that the current stand-off between the Tamil Nadu government and the Union government must be viewed. □□□

[This article first appeared in
The Telegraph.]

AN ICON OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Legacy of Lohia

Yogendra Yadav

ON MARCH 23, THE 115TH birth anniversary of Ram Manohar Lohia, Prime Minister Narendra Modi remembered him as a “visionary leader, fierce freedom fighter and an icon of social justice”. With the usual exception of Lohiaite socialist parties like the Samajwadi Party and the Rashtriya Janata Dal, the Opposition has made little attempt to draw upon Lohia’s political and ideological legacy. His legacy remains shrouded in distorted memories of his mercurial politics. Lohia’s most potent ideas—his reformulation of the received socialist doctrine and the accompanying political and policy prescriptions—have not travelled beyond a small and dwindling band of Lohiaites. This is a tragedy.

This is not the first time that Modi and other BJP leaders have invoked Lohia. Many of his stances and catchphrases have been twisted by BJP ideologues to serve their ends, contradicting Lohia’s political positions. His attacks on Jawaharlal Nehru

are relished by BJP leaders, and used to push agendas on which Lohia would have actually agreed with the former PM. His “anti-Congressism” has been used as a stick with which to beat Congress and as a fig leaf by some ex-socialists to defend their alliance with the BJP. His slogan of “Banish English” is used to support Hindi imposition, and his staunch support for backward castes is often used as a justification for the capture of power by dominant OBCs.

A recovery of Lohia’s legacy must begin by correcting these distortions. “Anti-Congressism” was not a political philosophy; it was a short-term tactic of anti-establishment politics. Lohia began his political journey with Congress and had opposed the idea of socialists leaving the party after Independence. He advocated “anti-Congressism” in the 1960s, in the heyday of Congress dominance. There is little doubt that if Lohia had been around today, he would have advocated “anti-BJPism”, and

Opposition unity against today’s political establishment.

Similarly, Lohia was not against English, a language he relished and used with great felicity and flair. He opposed the hegemony of English—not because it was a foreign language, but because it represented feudalism and class inequalities. Far from being a Hindi supremacist, Lohia was a passionate advocate of all Indian languages. No wonder he inspired leading writers in many Indian languages, including Hindi (Phanishwar Nath Renu, Raghuveer Sahay, Sarveshwar Dayal Saxena, Vijaydev Narayan Sahi), Assamese (Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya) and Kannada (U R Ananthamurthy, Poornachandra Tejaswi, P Lankesh and Siddalingaiah). He would have stood against the imposition of Hindi and for the unity of all the Indian languages.

Lohia’s policy on social justice was not focused only on OBCs. It so happens that Lohia’s socialist party became the political vehicle for the entry of OBCs in the Hindi heartland, especially Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. What Lohia argued for was a comprehensive policy of pref-

erential opportunities. While invoking his demand for 60 percent quota for backwards—captured in his slogan “pichhada pave sau me saath”—it is often forgotten that, for Lohia, “pichhada” included OBCs, Dalits and Adivasis as well as women. He saw gender injustice as the primary one among the six forms of injustice that called for *saptakranti*—seven revolutions. Lohia’s position on social justice—an intersectional approach that combined caste, class and gender—can be the basis for a social bloc at the bottom of the pyramid that is needed to take on the BJP’s hegemony today.

One of the central challenges of secular politics today is its lack of cultural resources rooted in civilisational heritage and nationalist

imagination. Lohia’s use of the cultural alphabet for a radical socialist politics can help fill this vacuum. Lohia came up with striking metaphors for political action. According to him Draupadi, the wise, witty, fearless and independent-minded heroine of the Mahabharata, was the ideal of Indian womanhood, as opposed to the meek and obedient image of Sati-Savitri. He drew upon the tale of Nachiketa in the Ishopanishad to render the socialist idea of transcending private property as kanchanmukti. No wonder Lohia influenced many artists, including M F Husain, whose famous Ramayana and Mahabharata series were inspired by him.

Lohia’s critique of Hindu communalism was articulated through

the figures of Vashishtha and Valmiki. The former represented the narrow creed of upper-caste Hindus—fearful, suspicious of the other and repressive to those below—that dominates the Indian mind when it is in retreat. The latter represents the liberal tradition within Hinduism that is open to internal reforms, demands for justice and external influences. What is presented as Hindus vs Muslims or other minorities is, at its core, a clash between two streams within Hinduism. When the liberal streak dominates Hinduism, India is on the ascent. The rise of illiberal or narrow Hinduism—as in recent times—is associated with India’s decline as a nation and a civilisation. □□□

[The writer is member, Swaraj India, and national convener of Bharat Jodo Abhiyaan]

OVER SEVEN DECADES OF STRUGGLE

‘Voice of the Voiceless’

Dalai Lama

IN MY ROLE AS THE DALAI Lama, I was trying to mitigate the disaster for my people. On October 26, 1951, approximately three thousand troops from the People’s Liberation Army’s Eighteenth Route Army entered Lhasa. Soon after, a further large detachment of soldiers arrived, and combined with a large influx of horses, this led to a serious food shortage. Lhasa in 1951 had a local population of just over thirty thousand, so one can imagine the impact of such a massive influx of Chinese troops in the city. This situation came to worsen further as thousands of Tibetans came as refugees from eastern Tibet.

The period between 1951 and 1959 proved to be one of the most challenging times of my life. In part, I was still studying intensively for my final Geshe Lharam degree. Geshe Lharam is the highest academic

degree one can obtain within the formal scholarly training of the great monastic universities of the Geluk school, analogous to a doctorate in divinity, which would culminate in February 1959. In part, I was going through a massive learning curve as a young man in the complexities of politics, having received no formal training in any of these matters.

Of course, the rigorous education I was receiving in Buddhist philosophy and psychology did help me immensely in maintaining my sanity against the complex political challenges I had no choice but to face as the leader of the Tibetan people. And my on-the-job education meant dealing with the very real disagreements between my government and the Chinese generals who were stationed in Lhasa and had all the guns. I was often caught between the extremely reluctant and at times confrontational Tibetan offi-

cials, on the one hand, and the increasing heavy-handedness and haughty attitudes of the Chinese generals, on the other. Ultimately, in 1952, my two prime ministers (one lay and one monastic) were forced to resign by the Chinese. I made the decision not to appoint replacements to these posts since they would simply be scapegoats, and it was better that I accept the responsibilities myself. The situation in Lhasa was getting more tense by the day.

I also still had to govern, and one of my priorities was to improve our system and society. I set up a reform committee to help create a more equitable system with explicit attention paid to the needs of the ordinary people and the poor. As a child growing up, I learned a lot from sweepers at my residence, who were often my playmates, about the problem of injustice and abuse by the powerful. But I faced major obstacles from the Chinese since they wanted reforms according to their own system, along lines introduced in mainland China. They probably felt that if changes were initi-

ated by the Tibetans themselves, it might hinder their own agenda.

So, when in 1954 the Chinese government invited me to Beijing, I felt it was the only option left to me to attempt to improve my people's deteriorating situation. In June, I received a telegram from Deng Xiaoping, then the senior figure responsible for Tibetan affairs in the Chinese leadership, inviting me to attend the inaugural National People's Congress in Beijing in September 1954. The same invitation was extended to the Panchen Lama. Although the Tibetans in Lhasa were deeply concerned about my trip to Beijing, I decided that it was best that I go for the sake of my people. To assuage their fear, during a large gathering of Tibetans at a religious ceremony at Norbulingka, my summer residence, I reassured them and promised to be back within a year.

To this day, I remember when I left Lhasa for Beijing, there were so many people crying. I heard some of the older women shouting, "Please don't go! It would be not good!" As there was no bridge over the Kyichu River at the time, we had to cross it in the traditional Tibetan coracles, made out of yak hide stretched over a willow frame. On the sides of the river there were so many people crying; some even seemed they might jump into the river. Later I heard that some fainted and even died.

On September 4, 1954, Panchen Lama and I, with our delegations, finally arrived in Beijing by train from Xi'an. We were received at the station by Prime Minister Zhou Enlai;

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Vice Chairman Zhu De, who was also the commander-in-chief of the People's Liberation Army and a member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo; and other Chinese officials. A few days later, I met Chairman Mao Zedong himself for the first time. He was sixty-one years old to my nineteen. He was warm and welcoming.

This meeting, joined by other top leaders, including Zhao Enlai and Liu Shaoqi, took place at the house of reception, a former imperial garden adjacent to the Forbidden City and later transformed into a compound that houses government offices as well as residences for senior leadership. The setting of this meeting was quite majestic with its opulent imperial legacy unmistakable. Here we were, myself only nineteen years old and the Panchen Lama sixteen years old, in a formal meeting with Chairman Mao himself, flanked by Communist China's most senior leaders. That we felt awed and somewhat nervous would be an understatement. At this first meeting, only Chairman Mao and I spoke. Mao said that he and the Central Government were very happy about my first visit to Beijing, and that the relationship between the Chinese and Tibetans was very important. He also assured me that in the future the Central Government would make great efforts to help develop Tibet. On my part, I responded to Mao, saying I was very happy to have the opportunity to meet him and other leaders of the Chinese Communist Party.

The meeting lasted about an hour. As we left, Mao and other leaders accompanied us out of the house, and Mao himself opened the car door for me. As I was getting into the car, Mao shook my hand and said, "Your coming to Beijing is coming back to your own home. Whenever you come to Beijing, you

can call on me... Don't be shy; if you need anything, just tell me directly."

I came out of that meeting impressed with Mao and encouraged at the possibility that things could improve in Tibet. With me in the car was Phuntsok Wangyal, a rare Tibetan Communist, who was my official interpreter during my stay in Beijing. I was so relieved that this first meeting with Mao and other Chinese leaders went well—in fact, I hugged Phuntsok Wangyal and told him that Mao was truly unlike anyone I had met. The success of this first meeting also reassured my Tibetan entourage, including especially my senior tutor, Ling Rinpoche, who had been feeling quite worried about me. Phuntsok Wangyal was a true believer in Communism in its original Marxist internationalist sense. And at the time he believed, later to his disappointment, that the Chinese Communists also shared this internationalist vision of Marxism. (Decades later, when Phuntsok Wangyal was allowed to visit Europe, I was able to speak with him by phone. I asked him, "What happened to your dream of true socialism?" He just laughed.)

On September 16, I addressed the first National People's Congress, noting that the draft constitution of the People's Republic of China states, in particular, that all nationalities may draw up their rules governing the exercise of autonomy and separate regulations in accordance with the special features of the development so that they can exercise full autonomy. By then, I had been made a vice president of the steering committee of the People's Republic of China. □□□

[Excerpted with permission from Voice for the Voiceless: Over Seven Decades of Struggle with China for My Land and My People, the Dalai Lama, HarperCollins. Courtesy: Scroll.in]

LETTERS

Death Pits Still

Safai Karmachari Andolan is deeply pained and distressed at the continuing practice of manual scavenging in India.

Even though there is such rapid progress of infrastructure, science and technology in the country, many states are still using dry latrines and employing Safai Karmachari women to clean the dry latrines.

There are dry latrines in 36 districts in the states of UP, MP, Bihar, Jharkhand and J&K.

Just in the last five years 419 Safai Karmacharis have been reported as killed in sewer and septic tanks.

The GOI has claimed spending thousands of crores of rupees to enhance the sanitation infrastructure and mechanisation of sewerage work. The GOI claims to have spent more than 55000 crores rupees to build more than 110 million toilets across the country in rural and urban areas. Then why are there still dry latrines and why are women still forced into manual scavenging and cleaning dry latrines in addition to cleaning open drains, railway tracks, open defecation and insanitary latrines.

The Self-Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS) has been replaced by the National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE) from 2023-24 with a Rs 97.41 crore allocation. Around 3 4,800 Urban Local Bodies are to be covered to benefit about one lakh sewers and septic tank workers with the budgetary outlay of Rs 350 crore during the next three years up to 2025-26. Then why are people still getting killed in sewer and septic tanks even today. On 16th March 2025, three persons were forced to enter a manhole by the Delhi Jal Board in New Friends Colony and one person was killed. The other two persons are battling for their lives in the hospital.

The minister for social justice and empowerment and the GOI continue to be in denial of the continuing practice of manual scavenging, prevalence of dry latrines and sewerage deaths. The min-

ister repeatedly reports to the parliament that there is no manual scavenging in the country. This is absolutely shameful.

The government is repeatedly and deliberately fudging data on sewerage workers deaths. Why is the government making such false and misleading statements? How will we stop this atrocity of manual scavenging and deaths in sewer and septic tanks if the government that is responsible to protect us is only interested in protecting the perpetrators of these caste atrocities?

Safai Karmachari Andolan Stop Deportation

In a few days, 60 brave human rights defenders in Pakistan could be deported to Afghanistan, where they face prison, torture, or even death.

They have raised their voices for women's rights, democracy and freedom and the Taliban want to silence them forever.

With a massive global outcry, people can push Pakistan to stop these high-risk deportations. The government has backed down before under international pressure, and together people can make it happen again.

For decades, Pakistan has been a refuge for Afghans, but now deportations are escalating. The coming wave of expulsions will be devastating especially for those who dared to fight for human rights. The UN has already documented hundreds of extrajudicial killings by the Taliban—sending these activists back is certainly a death sentence.

Massive raids are happening everyday in Islamabad, and these activists are in hiding. Afghan arrests are taking place as one reads these lines, and deportations could happen within hours.

Miguel, Avaaz Team Casteism in West Bengal

By now the whole country is fully aware how the administration and the Calcutta High Court have rightly forced two temples in West Bengal to allow Dalits, officially called Scheduled Caste (SC), to pray there, putting an end to centuries of discrimination, segregation and humiliation.

While it was the police and the gov-

ernment that helped Dalits enter the Shiv temple in Burdwan district's Gidhagram, a High Court judge played a stellar role in stamping out the caste apartheid in another Shiv temple in Nadia district's Debogram.

Both the cases caught a lot of Indians by surprise essentially because West Bengal is widely perceived as a progressive and egalitarian state, which not only witnessed powerful reforms movements against superstitions and caste inequalities stemming from the Brahminical order but had the good fortune of being ruled by communists for over three decades.

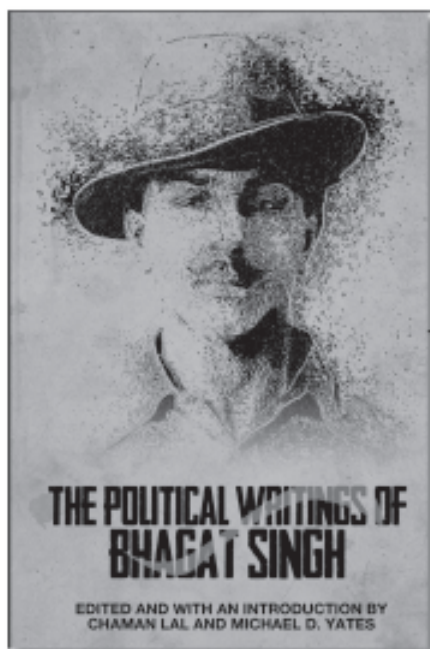
Naturally enough, the unprecedented and dramatic lifting of the bar on Dalits' entry into the two temples received a lot of publicity in the print, electronic and social media. But the aftermath is not known to most people and merits immediate attention.

The upper caste living in 800-1000 brick-and-cement houses have stopped buying milk from Dalits and are shooing them away from their groceries, leaving them with no other option but to travel miles to buy food and other essentials of daily use. Moreover, upper caste-owned auto rickshaws are refusing to ferry low caste passengers to teach them a lesson for raising their head. Besides hurling casteist slurs and openly issuing threats of physical attacks, even priests who are supposed to embody all that's good and saintly, are bluntly refusing to assist Dalits in performing rituals before deities in the temple's sanctum sanctorum.

Unlike Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, West Bengal appears to be free from the scourge of casteism for two main reasons. Firstly, the western-educated, left-liberal Bengali middle and upper class, called the *Bhadrolok*, or the social elite, has always denied the existence of casteism with a straight face. Jyoti Basu had famously said that caste simply did not exist in Bengal which was divided into two classes – rich and poor. But the Shiv temple episode tells a different tale. Hidden casteism is no less obnoxious than what people see in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

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US PAPERBACK PRICE: \$26

ISBN: 978-1-68590-066-3

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