

frontier

Vol. 57 : No. 8

ISSN 0016-2094

August 18-24, 2024

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Published weekly for Germinal Publications
Pvt. Ltd. by Sharmistha Dutta from 44, Balaram
Dey Street, Kolkata-700006 and Printed by her
at Laser Aid, 35A/3, Biplabi Barin Ghosh Sarani,
Kolkata-700 067.

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Website: <https://www.frontierweekly.com>
Telephone : 2530-0065

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

After the Assassination

THE ASSASSINATION OF ISMAIL HANIYEH—THE LEADER OF Hamas's Qatar-based office—in Iran, is unlikely to change the war dynamics at the moment, albeit tensions are mounting in the Middle East. No doubt people in Israel and Lebanon are on edge as the possibility of heightened violence looms large over the region. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei immediately vowed to avenge Haniyeh's death and is believed to have already ordered a strike on Israel. But to resort to any armed retaliation would invite a full-fledged war with Israel. Also, Israel has not commented on the death of Haniyeh. Experts are reading too much between the lines predicting a regional flare-up. Not that Haniyeh's assassination was the first of its kind. Nor it would be the last. In the yester years they carried out a number of assassinations—it is part of their war gambling. They have also killed Fuad Shukur, a military adviser to Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah. A commander with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) was also assassinated in Syria, not long after Haniyeh's demise. This terroristic programme is actually aimed at derailing the on-going peace process and stopping any immediate truce. Hamas has second-ranking leadership. So they didn't take much time to replace Haniyeh's place. In truth a cease-fire is not imminent, notwithstanding dozens of UN resolutions. The negotiations that dragged for all these months were a ruse. It was a tactical ploy to carry on war by diplomatic means. Many Israelis disagree with their government and support cease-fire that would bring hostages to their families. But they don't matter.

America's apparent disapproval of Israel's attempt to escalate war in West Asia is anything but sheer hypocrisy. While continually advocating cease-fire and two-state solution, Washington doesn't stop arms supply to Israel. They are now sending jets and warships to protect their bases in the Middle East and strengthen Israel's military capabilities. The lack of a formal security pact with the United States allows Israel to risk escalation and defy America's veiled warning, somewhat openly.

Israel's war cabinet thinks the best way to ensure Israel's security and bring hostages home is to defeat Hamas on the battlefield. After every bombing Netanyahu emphasised that Hamas was cracking and weakening. But the ground reality is completely otherwise. They have bombed Gaza to the Stone Age and yet Hamas resurrects and regroups within a short period. Israelis and their American patrons have learnt nothing from Vietnam.

It's not that easy to kill an idea which is deep-rooted in Palestinian psyche. Then militarily Hamas is not fighting an isolated battle. As long as they have a solid rear in Iran that supports it in every possible way, Hamas will continue fighting despite losses.

Meanwhile, Israel has gone on record that they want war to end but on their terms and timeline. In other words war will continue and cries of Palestinian mothers and children will bury under rubble. The Israelis have no intention of walking away from the fight with Hamas's top leadership remaining intact and

Yaha Sinwar, the Group's Gaza leader, believes he is winning the war by engaging Israeli forces into a grinding conflict that has isolated Israel internationally.

But the Israeli authorities simply ignore international outcry against them. Nor are they afraid of strictures by the International Court of Justice. They don't attach much importance to protests by peace activists against the Netanyahu government across the world. Even Jewish people, both at home and abroad are protesting against Israeli barbarism and demanding immediate

cease-fire as many hostages are still in captivity of the militants. If the war lingers sufferings of Palestinians will multiply. Gaza is already a living hell that beggars description.

If anything, a fight to the finish as the Israeli doctrine states, will do more harm than good, causing more civilian deaths, radicalising more people, particularly the youth, making it too difficult for Israel to declare an outright 'victory' anytime soon. Hamas has so far succeeded in absorbing the Israeli onslaught and their fighters are ready to sacrifice for a cause. □□□

COMMENT

Remembering Stan Swamy

THE PEOPLE'S UNION FOR CIVIL Liberties (PUCL), Gujarat, organised an event in Ahmedabad entitled "Remembering Fr. Stan Swamy in Today's Challenging Reality" in the memory of Fr. Stan Swamy on his third death anniversary. The event included a discussion of the new criminal laws enforced since July 1, 2024.

At the start of the event Fr Cedric Prakash spoke about Fr Stan Swamy, a fearless defender of tribal rights in Jharkhand, who was arrested by the NIA in 2018 in the context of the Bhima Koregaon case.

Human rights defenders and members of political parties across the nation had protested the arrest of the then 81-year-old activist who had worked tirelessly with Adivasis to defend their rights. He passed away on July 5, 2021 at the Holy Family Hospital, Mumbai, due to complications related to Covid while still under arrest..

Advocate Lara Jesani of the Bombay High Court delivered the keynote address and discussed the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS),

Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA) which have replaced the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), and Indian Evidence Act, respectively and their implications for citizens' rights.

She expressed serious concern regarding the manner in which the Law Commission was bypassed, views of public and experts not considered in the process of overhauling the criminal jurisprudence of the country, by just entrusting the task to a five member committee.

It was strange that when 80-85% of the BNS, BNSS and BSA was taken verbatim from the erstwhile CRPC, IPC and the Indian Evidence Act and just reorganised, rather than "decolonised" as claimed, that the laws were replaced when the limited changes could have been brought through amendments as was being done from time to time..

While examining the new criminal laws, Jesani expounded on the issues they throw up, some key ones being:

(i) the discretion given to the

police to conduct a preliminary investigation before deciding whether an FIR should be filed,

(ii) the vagueness in the number of days of police custody that could be granted which could result in a situation where the earlier provision limiting to the first 15 days could be now extended to 60 or 90 days, and thereby almost pre-closing the possibility of bail during this entire period

(iii) the introduction of provisions from anti-terror law UAPA into the BNS, the introduction of the controversial sedition-like law in a graver and more dangerous form,

(iv) criminalisation of hunger strike by protestors, and

(v) the admissibility of electronic evidence without any safeguards for privacy and data protection or procedures for seizure of devices and integrity of device and data, and other provisions which give arbitrary and sweeping powers to the police.

In truth the procedural law in the earlier criminal jurisprudence flowed from Article 21, which has been overturned by the new laws.

If anything the struggle of the minorities to make their voices heard in the context of the spread of hate speech and targeted violence would be seriously affected as a result of the sweeping powers given to the

police in the new criminal laws.

The manner in which Fr Stan Swamy was incarcerated under draconian laws was an indication of how the new criminal laws could be used to snatch away civil liberties and fundamental freedoms of citizens.

The changes in procedural law

as envisaged in the new criminal laws could have serious implications on laws like the SC&ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. The new laws would be instrumental in suppressing the on-going struggles of the Dalit and Adivasi communities for justice. □□□

[Contributed by Gova Rathod]

NOTE

Costs of War and Conflicts

Bharat Dogra writes:

GENERALLY THE MOST widespread single indicator of costs of war that has been commonly used refers to the number of people who die in a war or conflict directly due to the violence of the conflict including shooting, bomb-blasts etc. However it is increasingly realised that wars also increase the possibilities of hunger, displacement, homelessness, collapse of water and sanitation facilities as well as other essential infra-structure, denial of medical care, spread of disease, mental stress and suicides. All this also results in a large number of deaths.

While deaths caused by violence like shooting and bombs is referred to as deaths caused directly by war, the other deaths are referred to as deaths caused indirectly by wars and conflicts. The indirectly caused deaths can be very high in the context of civil wars. However even in other wars these have been found to be generally much higher than directly caused deaths.

This concept of indirectly caused deaths received a lot of attention in Iraq where a very large number of deaths of children were reported due to indirect causes. Another factor that was highlighted here was that use of depleted uranium weapons leaves behind high risks of very serious diseases like cancer and this

continues to cause high levels of distress many years or even decades after the actual fighting has stopped. In other conflicts the use of landmines (example Angola), cluster bombs (as in Laos) and chemical warfare and herbicides (as in Vietnam) have left behind very long-term destructive impacts (not to mention the widely known and most horrible long-term impacts of atom bombs suffered in the two Japanese locations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki).

More recently it is the comprehensive estimates prepared by Brown University regarding the costs of the USA's War on Terror which have drawn a lot of attention to the concept of indirect costs. In these estimates during the roughly two decades of the War of Terror 2001-21 it was estimated that 0.9 million or 9 lakh people were directly killed. However the estimates of indirect deaths were nearly four times of this. If one adds directly and indirectly caused deaths then as many as 4.5 million deaths were caused, mostly in countries like Iraq, Afghanistan etc. but each and every affected country was not covered.

In the case of the ongoing Gaza conflict somewhat similar assumptions have been used to find out the number of indirectly caused deaths. In Gaza the latest estimate is that

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nearly 38,000 people have died directly in the violence. However this does not include those people who were buried under the rubble of destroyed buildings and hence could not be identified or counted. Roughly their number has been estimated to be about 10,000.

If these numbers are counted then the number increases to about 48000 directly caused deaths by violence. However if it is assumed that 4 indirect deaths are caused per directly caused death, as in the case of Brown University's estimates for the War on Terror, then the number of indirectly caused deaths is about 192,000 and the number of total deaths in the Gaza conflict up to July 14 2024 is about 240,000. This amounts to about 10 percent of the entire population which is a very high estimate for a very small region like Gaza within a period of about just 9 months of conflict. The reason for this is that living conditions of Gaza have been ruined on such a colossal scale by relentless bombing that survival is indeed becoming very difficult.

In fact indirectly caused deaths can easily be an even higher multiple of directly caused deaths in several conflicts. Various estimates indicate that these can range from three times to even higher than ten times. Chances of these higher estimates are higher in conflict zones like Gaza where living conditions have been so badly destroyed that most essential infra-structure has collapsed.

The indirect and even direct deaths have been even more difficult to estimate for the Ukraine conflict as very different statistics have been emerging from various sources. Still as the

number of directly caused deaths is at least 200,000 (likely to be more) and as there has been massive destruction of basic living conditions over vast areas what one can conservatively estimate is that indirectly caused deaths here too are a multiple of four or about 800,000 and hence the overall mortality of this conflict has crossed about one million.

Then one must not forget the large number of people, soldiers as well as civilians, who are very seriously injured or disabled in wars and have to live with these injuries and disabilities for a long time.

The Global Peace Index (GPI) ranks 163 independent states and territories according to their level of peacefulness, covering 99.7 percent of the world's population. Produced by the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), the GPI has been frequently mentioned as the world's leading measure of global war and peace.

One of the most significant findings of this report is that many of the conditions that precede major conflicts are higher now than they have been since the end of the Second World War. □□□

HUMRA QURAIISHI'S COLUMN

They Don't Talk of Basic Issues

Humra Quraishi

IT WAS JUST TOO SHOCKING to hear what BJP's Anurag Thakur had to say in the Parliament vis-a-vis *jaati* and his absolutely crude remark in this context, hurled at the Leader of the Opposition, Rahul Gandhi. During the debate in the House on the Budget, Anurag Thakur, who represents Hamirpur in the Lok Sabha, took a swipe at Mr Gandhi over his caste evoking instant reaction from the opposition benches.

Today the Right-Wing rulers of the day do not wish to talk or dwell or focus on the severe problems facing the citizens. They seem so busy trying to unleash hatred for the 'other' along the Hindu-Muslim strain, that they don't seem bothered whether the masses, live or die!

Nah, they can't see the seriousness of it all, with basic infrastructures giving way, as Nature's fury is on the rise... unabated the floods and the disasters hitting and killing so many people. They don't dwell on the rising prices of everyday commodities ...rising to such an extent that it's getting difficult to run the

kitchen. They don't talk of the rising numbers of the unemployed. They do not even acknowledge the fact that corruption has corrupted the education sphere in that dangerous full-fledged way, affecting the future of hundreds and thousands of students. They don't talk of the rising crime graph. They don't seem bothered if hate crime and lynch killings are happening more than often, in the midst of the communal pollution spreading out all around as never before. They don't seem bothered if hundreds of thousands of people are rendered homeless, after bulldozers destroy home after home. This is the plight of the citizens!

It gets obvious that in the midst of this severe crisis cum havoc, all possible ways are being put forth by the Right-Wing to add to the communally tense atmosphere. Today distractions are on, along the Hindu-Muslim strain. Any crisis, big or small, then dragged along are those typical communal ploys to distract and hoodwink the masses. It's an utterly painful situation. After all, Hindus and Muslims have lived to-

gether in this country for centuries. Mind you, co-existed with a certain level of respect and love for each other. Togetherness between communities was intact till about the '70s; where each community realised the differences and yet lived on par.

Though several of my parents and grandparents' friends would not eat at our place but they would decline rather too subtly; "*aaj hamara vrat hai/ today we are fasting*". Probably, the non-vegetarian fare cooked in our homes came in way but it was so gently put through that there was nothing hurtful about it. Refinement or call it sensitivity was still intact, to a great extent.

Today there could be attacks on the food and fruit sellers along the various alibis but we decide to keep away! There could be hundreds and thousands of food bloggers and foodies and food enthusiasts yet not one stands up to voice their disgust at that those Right-Wing communal tactics ...unsparing even the daily wagers, all those hapless sellers!

Can food and fruit be spread from this Hindu Muslim thing! I'm reminded of what Sufi Hazrat Nizamuddin said—words along the strain: when our Creator didn't discriminate between countries and communities and castes and creeds

whilst spreading out His bounty—sunshine and trees and fruits and rivers and the air we breathe—then who are we, the fragile human beings, to interfere and throw about those don'ts!

Where are the watch-dog groups that could order the communal characters to shut up just there and then, so that they can't get further, with their communal ploys. Today, it's getting frightful how television debates take place; shrieks and counter screams, never really focusing on actual issues and genuine

concerns of the citizens... Even at the cost repetitive, let me say only a handful are speaking out...resisting the poisonous unleash spread out by the Right-Wing forces, who seem as though determined to push the already battered shattered communities into some sort of oblivion or towards hopelessness of the worst sorts, where even that basic confidence gets hit.

□□□

Looking back, as a child or even as an adult I wasn't particularly confident about my knowledge of the

various customs and also about the meaning tucked in the various greetings and more along the strain. Though my parents had engaged a maulvi sahib but there were few free-flowing meaningful discussions at home. In fact, I started saying 'As Salaam Alaikum' with a certain degree of confidence, only after Khushwant Singh insisted he would greet me with that greeting, after prefixing "Tum kaise Musalmaan ho ... As-Salaam-Alaikum nahin kahteeho!... This greeting carries such a beautiful meaning—May peace on you." □□□

CHANGING SOCIAL REALITY

Election Result, Concrete Situation, and the Left

Arup Baisya

[This article outlines the broad narrative of the recently concluded parliamentary election and delineates the inherent social dynamics ingrained in political articulations in the hustings. The decline in the left's vote share in the erstwhile left bastions and gain in new areas reveal the divergent trends in left politics. The concatenation of events in the hustings and election result indicate a change in the social reality where a radical paradigmatic shift is possible provided the ideas of intertwined criteria of class struggle from below and reform from above is internalised in left strategy and praxis.]

RECENTLY CONCLUDED IN-
dian parliamentary election reveals that the two formations, NDA and INDIA, focused their campaign on two contested political terrain of Hindutva and development on one side and the caste democracy and constitutional federalism on the other. The CSDS-Lokniti post-poll survey report makes it quite clear that people's assessment of their own economic conditions made a large difference in their voting choices. Those who felt economically secure or experienced improvement in their financial well-being had likely to make their choice to vote for the candidates of the ruling regime. Conversely, individuals facing economic hardship, job loss, or financial instability might have sought to punish the incumbent. But the victory pattern of INDIA

especially in northern and western India unveils the fact that the incumbent Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) faced a tough challenge and electoral drubbing in the regions and states where impacts of farmers' movement, Agniveer protest in continuation of the migrants' reverse march as mark of protest against sudden Covid lockdown were significant. It means that collective social dynamics were set in motion to articulate and transform the individual need emanating from economic distress into a desire for the defeat of the incumbent government. Both sides of contesting political formations tried to accommodate this desire in their political narratives by incorporating welfarism by the BJP and distributive justice by the Congress. A section of voters who felt financially secured are the ben-

eficiaries of the limited trickle-down effect of GDP growth and developmental investment in infrastructure in consonance with the policy framework pursued by the incumbent Government which promoted the neoliberal logic of accumulation through displacement. The majority of voters who are left outside the ambit of this policy of the BJP Government had been attracted by the demand-side policy and distributive schemes announced by the Congress in their manifesto. The almost equally poised election result

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Editor: Karnika Palwa

Production: Hema Vaishnavi

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in terms of seat and vote share makes this election a fascinating story to delineate the shifting coordinate of the intersection of three dimensions of the here and now as stated above.

This shifting coordinate of the three dimensions taken *pari passu* provokes the observers to undertake a thought experiment. In this election, the left votes from the erstwhile left stronghold marked a significant decline. Interestingly enough, a CPM candidate from Rajasthan secured a victory score and made the sole left political presence in northern India a reality. Furthermore, a large number of Lohiaite socialists and social activists who had hitherto remained out of the purview of any political party and political activism found it an opportune moment to emerge as a collective force to build public opinion against BJP's divisive politics and Modi's authoritarianism. They were extremely active in favour of INDIA, especially in UP and they took a tactical position in Bihar in favour of the old guard in JDU. This is not merely an old phenomenon that is reconstructed in a new setting. To understand the shifting coordinate, the emergence of a new dimension in the here and now needs to be analysed. Unlike the bourgeois

revolution in the Western world, the late capitalist development in the countries of the third world or global south trod a path of passive revolution and thus the concomitant emergence of doubly-free workers and civil society is aborted. But society is agog with the desire to surpass this barrier due to the internal dynamics of capitalist social relations of production especially in agriculture. Despite the thrust of the neoliberal restructuring to accommodate emerging civil society to transform it into a political society, a new kind of civil society with Indian characteristics is raising its head in this transitional phase with shifting coordinates. The effective role of Lohiaite socialists and social activists in this election can be visualised in this backdrop.

What would have changed in the Indian political canvass had the communists and the left adhered to the logic of class struggle without siding with the forces of neoliberalism or welfarism of mixed-economy or political centralisation and diversity from the beginning and led the various emerging class and social struggles? It would have certainly ensured the presence of the left forces in the entire Indian political geographical landscape. This would have given them much leverage in aligning with the forces of bourgeois democracy for a fight against authoritarianism or fascism, although fascism is systemically placed on shaky ground in the changing dynamics of the post-Covid scenario and shifting global balance of power. With the left forces in a declining trend with continuous weakening of power, the three dimensions of the here and now as revealed in this election process boiled down to a Cartesian coordinate of two dimensions. Both sides, NDA and INDIA, had accommodated the third dimension for a social status quo ante

of Indian 'unity and diversity'. The result shows the same two repertoires of pitting Mandal against Kamandal being reenacted in differently articulated languages and socio-economic accommodations to counter the rise of plebeians. But this time forces of Mandal politics have not been defeated under neoliberal pressure, rather the juggernaut of Hindutva politics has been contained in such a way that the space for the rise of plebeians has been extended with forces of liberal democracy remaining out of power.

This thought experiment can be extrapolated to put into reality check if the main left parties' electoral wins and losses are juxtaposed for comparison. In the erstwhile stronghold of Kerala, Bengal, and Tripura, CPM and CPI combined won a single seat. The vote share in Bengal and Tripura plummeted from 6.33% in 2019 to 5% in 2024. While BJP has increased its vote share in Kerala, there is a significant 2-4% erosion in the Left's vote base compared to 2019. The secular decline in the left support base is the result of CPIM's strategy as the main left party eschewed the **class struggle** to create a space for a class compromise in the neoliberal phase to remain in power at any cost. A brief account of the left's rise and decline would substantiate the claim that the shrinking left base is the fallout of preferring reform from above to struggle from below. CPIM's leader from Kerala, EMS Namboodiripad, spearheaded the self-respect movement of the Ezhava caste and subsequently the worker-peasant struggle. In this backdrop of struggle, left government under the stewardship of EMS was formed in 1957, and before the swearing-in ceremony; EMS went to Punnapra-Vayalar to pay tribute to the martyrs of the uprising led by the communists against British India's princely state

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of Trivancore. It was the message that the class struggle is the foundation of a left party in power.

The land reform act was promulgated in 1969 in Kerala. Effective implementation of the act was possible largely due to the organised strength of the left movement and the fact that land reforms were implemented by the left-oriented government, unlike in most other states where the reforms were sought to be introduced from 'above' before the peasant masses were politically organised to fight for their rights. The movement which developed since the abolition of tenancy has three main components: struggle for higher wages, demand for fair prices for farm products, and struggle for land. But poor peasants have not in general been able to raise the productivity of their lands and their living standard for obvious reasons. Proletarianisation occurred as cheap labour along with pauperisation. In 1973, CPIM's central committee resolution adopted the strategy on agrarian questions. In this resolution, Sundarayya added emphasis on peasant struggle rather than on legislation of the government as a concession from the ruling class. Similarly, in the 1966 resolution, it was stated that working class hegemony over the Kisan movement could be ensured only if the proletarian party placed its principal reliance on the rural labourers and poor peasants. But this direction of left politics emphasising the class struggle from below as the driving force was gradually abandoned under pressure from two seemingly opposite directions to adopt the line of class compromise and reform from above without politically rejuvenating the masses from below for class emancipation. When the strategy of agrarian class struggle in the 1960s and seventies reached its culminating and limiting point thereby necessitating

the adoption of a new strategy of class struggle, the left thought it wise to break the barrier through reform from above. This in conjunction with the neoliberal phase of restructuring from above since 1980s instilled a sense of TINA factor which gradually decelerated the motion of party life based on struggle, and eventually, the staticity of mindset has become all-pervasive. The reform from above for the docile masses below is the best-case scenario for the ruling class politics to thrive and establish their political hegemony. This is what has happened in Kerala and other erstwhile bastions of left politics.

The left parties have jointly improved their performance in this Lok Sabha election as they managed to bag nine seats in four states. CPIM bagged one seat from Rajasthan as its candidate from Sikar Atma Ram won the election by more than 72000 votes. The CPI and CPI ML(Liberation) gathered two seats each in Tamil Nadu and Bihar respectively. CPIM had cut inroads earlier into Rajasthan by winning two assembly seats in 2018 by wresting both seats from the BJP. Both the constituencies have been hotbeds of farmer agitation and left-wing militancy. The party there had organised a slew of farmer agitations against the BJP governments in the state and the centre.

The gain of the left in certain areas indicates that the situation is changing. But the statement "situation is changing" is meaningless even in the essence of Newtonian relativity in the laws of physics of uniform motion, provided the change is not considered relative to something. The gain in other places especially in Rajasthan relative to the loss in the erstwhile left bastion of Bengal, Tripura, and Kerala reveals that there is a mismatch between objective reality and left subjective effort. The

electoral performance of the left and the Congress in the recently concluded parliamentary election tells people that the overall situation is taking a left turn opening a new horizon for a living interaction between ongoing class struggle and the left subjective effort for a political resurgence of masses from below and reform initiative from above. Such a scenario is anathema to ruling class hegemony that necessitates reform from above and docile masses below. The left in their erstwhile stronghold has fallen trapped in the ruling class narrative of passive revolution and thus the left is destined to leave space for BJP in their traditional bastions. Gramsci first indicated a revolution that was directed from above by elites and occurred without the active participation of the masses. His second conceptual framework described a passive revolution as a long historical process involving a set of molecular changes in society. Gramsci treated passive revolution as a blocked dialectic and an exception to the paradigmatic form of bourgeois revolution. In his terms, a passive revolution represented the contradictory concept of a revolution without a revolution. The resurgence of class and mass struggle is the third dimension in the here and now that breaks the status-quo-ante provided the left reorients their strategy to focus on the struggle as a pivot for change, and this sets the three-dimensional coordinate in motion for a radical change of space-time continuum. Thus the thought experiment finds its validity in reality check. □□□

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DHYANBINDU

COLLEGE SQUARE

REVIEW

The Theory of Basic Structure

Tamoghna Mitra

BE IT LAWYERS, OR BE IT politicians have time by time dismorphed the meaning of the constitution for their own sake. Doing so they have triggered the consequences of altering the sanctity of an institution, the primary task of which was to restore order to chaos. This has led to the mass losing faith in the integrity of the constitution and the ethical value it holds.

The book* explains that the Basic Structure Doctrine is a judicial principle that the Constitution of India has certain fundamental features that cannot be altered or destroyed through amendments by the Parliament. This doctrine ensures that the core values and principles of the Constitution are preserved and protected from any radical changes that could undermine its integrity.

The Basic Structure Doctrine was first conceptualised in the landmark case of *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala* in 1973. Prior to this case, the Supreme Court of India had held that Parliament had the power to amend any part of the Constitution, including fundamental rights. This was established in the *Shankari Prasad v. Union of India* (1951) and *Sajjan Singh v. State of Rajasthan* (1965) cases. However, the *Golaknath v. State of Punjab* (1967) case created a significant shift by ruling that Parliament could not amend fundamental rights.

In the *Kesavananda Bharati* case, the Supreme Court overruled the *Golaknath* judgment but introduced the Basic Structure Doctrine. The court held that while Parliament could amend any part of the Constitution, it could not alter the basic structure or framework of the Con-

*THE THEORY OF BASIC
STRUCTURE: SAVIOR OF THE
CONSTITUTION AND DEMOCRACY
by Vijay Kumar, Aakar Books
Price: 5.95

stitution. This doctrine was a middle path, balancing the need for constitutional flexibility with the necessity to protect its core principles.

The Supreme Court has not provided an exhaustive list of what constitutes the basic structure of the Constitution. Here lies the glory of the book that through various judgments, the author has identified certain elements as part of it. These include:

- 1. Supremacy of the Constitution:** The Constitution is the supreme law of the land, and all laws and amendments must conform to it.
- 2. Rule of Law:** The principle that all individuals and institutions are subject to and accountable under the law.
- 3. Judicial Review:** The power of the judiciary to review and strike down laws and amendments that violate the Constitution.
- 4. Separation of Powers:** The division of government responsibilities into distinct branches to prevent anyone branch from exercising the core functions of another.
- 5. Federalism:** The distribution of power between the central government and the states.
- 6. Secularism:** The state's impartiality towards all religions, ensuring equal treatment of all religions.
- 7. Sovereign, Democratic, and Republic nature:** The nature

of the Indian state as defined by the Preamble.

- 8. Freedom and Dignity of the Individual:** Protection of fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals.

The book provides several critical interpretations of the doctrine as seen through the eyes of both Indian and foreign enthusiasts. Since the *Kesavananda Bharati* case, the Supreme Court has reaffirmed and elaborated on the Basic Structure Doctrine in various cases. For instance, in *Indira Nehru Gandhi v. Raj Narain* (1975), the court invalidated a constitutional amendment that sought to eliminate judicial review of elections for the Prime Minister and Speaker, citing it as a violation of the basic structure.

In *Minerva Mills v. Union of India* (1980), the Supreme Court struck down parts of the 42nd Amendment, reinforcing that the power of judicial review is a part of the basic structure. Similarly, in *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India* (1994), the court held that federalism, secularism, and democracy are part of the basic structure.

The book comments, that the Basic Structure Doctrine is significant because it acts as a safeguard against potential abuse of power by the Parliament. It ensures that the fundamental essence of the Constitution remains intact, preserving the vision of its framers. However, it has also faced criticism for giving the judiciary too much power to interpret what constitutes the basic structure, potentially leading to judicial overreach.

The Basic Structure Doctrine of the Indian Constitution is a crucial judicial innovation that protects the core principles and values enshrined in the Constitution. It ensures that while the Constitution can adapt and evolve, its foundational ethos

remains inviolable. This doctrine underscores the balance between constitutional flexibility and rigidity, ensuring the stability and continuity of the Indian democratic framework.

However, the book does have one flaw, the literature. A reading for public awareness should be in simple unflattering language which

can be understood by the most casual of readers. The book elaborates on a topic which should be of major public interest but for its own complexity is not. Therefore to make it more approachable one has to oversimplify the sketch of it so that the commoner can understand at least half of it. The book very subtly

attacks the attack on the Indian constitution by explaining thoroughly what the constitution is.

The book overall is a good read, it enlightens the reader about the perils of delusion and provides a way out from the manipulative insights created by the people who tarnish the constitution for their own benefit. □□□

INTELLECTUALS SELL ILLUSIONS

Party Wins, People Lose

Ranganayakamma

INTELLECTUALS ARE MAKING predictions on the present character of elections believing the constitution in force and democracy in circulation like innocent children. These intellectuals wish for a party to come to power which will do some good for the people. They only think about short-term relief while they do not in the least raise the issue of exploitation of labour. Under the current circumstances if one only thinks about quick-fix relief measures, what about lasting solutions? They say that if one suffers from a major illness should they ignore a temporary headache? True. To move a step forward one should take care of temporary problems too. But what about the major ailment? When will they address it? If the major ailment is the reason for the headache or this ache or that ache, is it possible to attend to the minor aches without attending to the major illness? When will they address the disease called exploitation of labour? This is not easily apparent to the common public but is it not known to even the intelligentsia? When will they tell the common public about that?

One cannot attribute malafide intentions to intellectuals who are pro-people. But if intellectuals deal with such topics superficially, observations and writings on seats tally in

elections will end up keeping the common man in a state of illusion. Are the intellectuals also getting used to being in this state of illusion?

These intellectuals consider that parties whether in power or not, differ in character and have different goals. It becomes clear, from the way every party implements programmes, that this is not the case. For instance, every party will implement the policy of privatisation. The only difference is in the degree, extent and pace of implementation. These parties give a life of job insecurity and dependence upon the mercies of private employers. Similarly, look at what these parties do in the name of liberalisation: All these parties give permissions in the name of 'ease of doing business' (liberal licensing) without bothering about environmental pollution or safe working conditions of the workers. On top of it, they allot land at throwaway prices to the exploiters. They supply electricity and water either completely free or at cheaper rates. They keep the 'doors' and 'windows' wide open in the name of globalisation. Will anyone of these parties reject these policies?

'Freedom has come! People fought and achieved' they say. Have they found a solution to the problem of unemployment? For the past 75 years, it has been there! Can't

pro-people intellectuals realise that the main reason for any problem, any kind of poverty is the capitalist mode of production which carries on the exploitation of labour on a large scale? Or even after realising it are they unable to tell the people? Are they unable to make it public even after grasping the real reasons for the price rise? What is the difference among these parties which fail to even fulfil basic needs of food, clothing, education, health and shelter? Do the intellectuals not know that these very parties are responsible for the accumulation of riches in one class and poverty in another class? Aren't these parties responsible for the existence of those who buy cars worth crores on one side

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and those who eke out a living by risking their lives entering man holes to clean the clogged drains?

They say that the Constitution must be saved! In actuality, the Constitution is at the root of several inequalities. It gives rights to own private property which facilitates the exploitation of labour to earn incomes namely, profits, interests and land rents. It sustains an unequal division of labour that confines some citizens to the bottommost physical labour throughout life while it enables some to perform only intellectual labour. It is no use to teach the working-class people to save this kind of constitution. The intellectuals say that a party which takes away even the basic token rights should not win the elections. But all the existing parties do behave in one way when in power and another way when not in power.

The intellectuals say that democracy is in danger. Do the intellectuals not know that democracy in its current form is meant only for a privileged few? How is it right to

create the illusion that in democracy people are the masters? Does it mean that there is democracy in the economic sphere even if the necessities of life and the means of production to produce those necessities are 'reserved' for a class and a few grains of reservation are thrown to the millions of people? These intellectuals say no to a government which misuses draconian, oppressive laws. When there are hostile classes in the society no government will be able to rule without these very repressive laws. In a 75-year-old history, one can see that these parties have either introduced new repressive laws or toughened the existing laws. Should pro-people intellectuals not recognise this fact and tell the people that in a society where there are inequalities in every sphere, elections are nothing but a means "to transfer power from one fraction of the ruling classes to the other."

About 155 years ago when an intellectual called Karl Marx recognised this fact. Haven't people in this country too noticed this in 75

years of existence of constitutional democracy? ("The general suffrage, till now... a plaything in the hands of the ruling classes, ...employed by the people to choose the instruments of parliamentary class rule once in many years..."—Marx)

The fact that the elections are abused as a toy in the hands of ruling classes is evident from the manner elections are held, isn't it? Isn't the aim of the elections to come back to power by doling out freebies like money, caste, and religion in the form of various schemes? Debates and writings on the facts related to the nature and character of these elections, parties and their policies are necessary. Whereas writings and debates about what will happen if this party comes to power or that party comes to power will remain as pastime chitt.

If correct political knowledge fails to reach the ordinary people, it is the people who will lose in every election, aren't they? □□□

(First appeared in Andhra Jyothy, a Telugu daily, dt. 4-7-2024. Translation: Liaqat Mirza)

REALISM AND ROMANTICISM

'Ankur' 50

Harsh Thakor

THIS YEAR THE HINDI FILM industry commemorates the 50th anniversary of Shyam Benegal's first feature film, *Ankur*, released in 1974 which also marked the debut of Anant Nag and Shabana Azmi.

Shyam Benegal here explored new horizons in storytelling. Since Independence possibly no movie transcended realism of social oppression as poignantly. Remarkable that in spite of not being a conventional entertainer, it created magnetic effect on the audience.

Ankur was part of the Shyam Benegal trilogy with *Nishant* and *Manthan*, exploring the transition

within India from the feudal system that prevailed and continued to prevail.

Ankur was set in the background of feudal oppression in the micro-cosmic rural world of a village in Andhra Pradesh, in the 1945 period. It was shot in Hyderabad.

In truth the film was made against the backdrop of major rebellions in India like Naxalbari movement, Jayaprakash Narayan movement, Dalit Panther uprising etc. It is filmed in the scenario of the 1970's peasant rebellions, which gave it a cutting edge.

Today, after 50 years of its release, its theme is as relevant as

ever. Caste, class and gender elements continue to plague Indian society as rampantly. To resurrect such a film in a form relevant to modern times, incorporating effect of globalisation and advent of age of mechanisation and surge of Hindu revivalism is the demand of the day.

Ankur is one of the most grounded and captivating Hindi social commentaries. It fuses a set of characters, exploring the intricacies of caste, class and gender in both rural and urban settings, in a most communicative manner. The strength of the film lies in the intensive exploration of characters and their motivations, the contradictory emotions they are dictated by, the stray glances and gestures, landscape details, soul searching use of folk music and natural sound.

Few Indian films ever as

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penetratively dug into the various characteristics interwoven to trigger feudal oppression or ignited the spirit of rebellion against feudal oppression, at such a scale

Ankur pioneered a new style or form in Hindi film making, introducing a style of naturalised acting and making actors dress in realistic costumes. Few films in Indian history epitomised experimentalism, to such an extent.

The languages used are the dialect of Dakhni Urdu, commonly used around Hyderabad. The blend of Dakhni and Telugu folk songs discovered new characters.

Without political propaganda or polemics the movie conveys the social nature of feudal society and the aversion of people towards it.

In classical style Benegal has grafted and dissected the scenes, doing complete justice to the theme. The cinematography was executed with high finesse creating a heart pulling effect on the audience.

In this movie, the very movements of artists convey the message as much as the dialogues, showing the mastery of the film maker. In the Brechtian manner it does ask the audience to respond without telling the viewer what to do.

The lack of singing and dancing gives this movie the crucial element of realistic edge that differentiates it from many others. From the chirping of the birds to the flow of the water, the sound effects were brilliantly affected, with use of natural sounds and traditional *alaaps*.

The abject submission of the oppressed to their lot is never projected for sympathy. However Benegal gives his characters time, reason and context to find their voices. With high craft movie illustrates how social conditions transpire inner change within people.

Brilliantly nuanced performances of both Shabana Azmi as Laxmi and Anant Nag as Surya, with both complementing themselves in a perfect chemistry. Both immersed in

the very thick of the skin of the characters, with inherent malleability and detachment, overcoming romanticism with realism, at a scale rarely touched on the silver screen. Nag instils realism with his sly looks, perfect mannerisms, and deft touches. Azmi with subtle craft illustrates the struggle of an oppressed woman against bondage.

Surya's father has a mistress and a son in the village, both of whom are accepted even by Surya's mother. The priest of the village hardly denotes that he is a man of God, yet holds a commanding position. An overseer is given free licence in broad daylight while Lakshmi is banished for stealing a few fistfuls of rice.

Surya, played by Anant Nag, is forced to relinquish higher studies to look after his father's property. He has to shift to the village to take responsibility of the farms and crops. Before shifting, he gets married but leaves his wife behind. In the village, he falls in love with the domestic worker; Lakshmi played by Shabana Azmi and promises to take care of her forever, after her husband apparently deserts her.

Finally, Surya's wife Saru played by the late social activist Priya Tendulkar returns to be with him in the village. Meanwhile, Lakshmi gets pregnant. Surya pleads her to abort the child because he cannot take the responsibility. She refuses to oblige him. Lakshmi's husband Kishtayya played by Sadhu Meher, returns back to her at the conclusion of the movie and gives her the money that he earned, while he was away. He assumes that the baby is his and Lakshmi's.

Ankur's climax is a powerful statement of the awakened consciousness of the oppressed peasants. A young boy flinging a stone across Surya's home manifests the rebellious spirit of the younger generation. A striking dichotomy is reflected of the enthusiasm of the people to protest injustice with the fear lying within them. □□□

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AN AVERTABLE DISASTER?

Kerala Landslides

NAPM

THE NUMBERS OF BOTH the dead and those missing seem to be constantly increasing, with local media reporting at least 300 people dead and 225 missing, as of now.

As has been reported, the colossal loss of life and injuries have been in the aftermath of the cloudburst, heavy rains and landslides in the Mundakkai and Chooralmalai regions in Wayanad district of Kerala. The state witnessed many tragic deaths due to landslides in 2018 and 2019, as well. Even as immediate relief is significant, this incident should not be passed off as '*yet another natural disaster*'! While broader climatic conditions like warming of the Arabian Sea has a key role to play in the changing rainfall patterns, leading to landslides, there are other human-induced or rather state-enabled actions like rampant deforestation and reckless construction that has accentuated the crisis. It is high time the underlying causes of these repeated landslides are officially acknowledged and necessary course-correction ensured, at the highest levels.

Environmentalists from Kerala have pointed out that Mundakkai has a history of many landslides and in fact is part of what is known as the '*Camel Hump*' mountain range. It is important to highlight that four years back, a high-level committee constituted by the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA) forewarned of landslides in the eastern slopes of the Western Ghats in Wayanad and recommended that 4,000 families be immediately shifted. It is a matter of extreme concern that the recommendations of this Committee were

ignored, in a way, paving the way for the current tragedy. The proposed construction of a 2,000-crore mega tunnel project, barely 2 km away from the current landslide in Mundakkai is likely to cause more such mishaps in the future.

The repeated disasters occurring in the highly ecologically sensitive Western Ghats has been a matter of acute concern for all people's movements and ecologists. The Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP), headed by Prof. Madhav Gadgil, in its Report submitted to Union Environment Ministry way back in 2011 highlighted the need for restraint in construction activities and in fact marked the current affected areas under 'Ecologically Sensitive Zone (ESZ)-1'. The Panel proposed that quarrying and red category industries should not be allowed in ESZ-I.

The Kerala Govt. should have diligently implemented the WGEEP Report and not allowed change in land use from forest to non-forest and agricultural to non-agricultural purposes. However, it has been pointed out that in violation of the Gadgil Committee recommendations, the Kerala Govt. permitted quarrying within a distance of 50 metres from human settlements, as against the Committee stipulation of 100 mts. The Reports by the Kerala Legislature after the 2018 disaster and the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment Report prepared by multilateral agencies including the United Nations, also clearly warned of adverse impacts due to interventions like roads and other constructions, mining and deforestation in the eco-sensitive areas.

"If one looks at the history of Kerala part of Western Ghats, it was

the Britishers who started huge tea, coffee and rubber plantations starting in the late 19th century. It has caused huge environmental degradation in the area. Tata and Harrison Malayalam are now the big planters now in the region. They behave like feudal lords, giving paltry sums as leases to the government and even encroaching on government lands and planting mono crops. The landslide-affected Mundakkai also is a tea-estate area owned by Harrison Malayalam Company".

Covering the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the Western Ghats region includes large tracts of biodiverse-rich and Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESA), that need to be protected, both as per the recommendations of the Gadgil Committee (WGEEP), as well as the Kasturi Rangan Committee (2013). However, successive Central Governments and different state governments have ignored these Reports and instead promoted reckless real estate boom, infrastructure 'development', indiscriminate construction, plantations, stone mining, sand mining, excavation, quarrying, hill-cutting, tourism etc. on hill tops, degraded forests and even river beds!

Tragically, the current paradigm of 'development' has intensified landslides across many states. India is red-flagged as one of the top-five landslide-prone countries in the world. As per official scientific estimates, there have been 80,000 incidents of landslides between 1998 and 2022 in 147 districts of 17 states and two union territories. Of this, maximum incidents of landslides have occurred in Uttarakhand, Kerala, Jammu and Kashmir, Mizoram, Tripura, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. Mizoram tops the list, followed by Uttarakhand and Kerala.

Considering the severity of the recent disaster, the National Green Tribunal (Southern Bench) has taken *suo moto* cognisance and directed the Govt. of Kerala to collect data on trigger points such as roads, buildings and existing quarries in and around the affected villages. People hope the NGT would comprehensively look into all the core causes and issue firm directives to the Govt. of Kerala, other state Governments and the Union of India.

State governments across the Western Ghats must urgently carry out time-bound scientific studies, including flood-risk mapping and identification of landslide-prone hotspots, since floods and landslides are cascading disasters. A strict restriction / ban on new and heavy constructions in all vulnerable and unstable areas

must be imposed, to prevent landslides and ensure floodplain protection. Governments must instead take pro-active steps to preserve and promote green cover and health, free flow of rivers in these areas.

Both the Central and state Governments must own up responsibility for the disasters, causes of which are also partly systemic. Governments must also make attempts to increase community and people's awareness in eco-sensitive areas to hazard /disaster warnings and support their pre-evacuation in time.

What urgently needed is effective implementation of the recommendations of the Madhav Gadgil Committee Report by the Centre and all states across the Western Ghats, at least now, with a sense of urgency and seriousness. The administrative

and political leadership at the Centre and in Kerala, both current and former, must be held fully accountable for non-implementation of the Gadgil Committee Report and the KSDMA Report, leading to the massive human tragedy.

Many of those affected in the landslide are working-class local residents, adivasis, migrant workers employed in tea, coffee and cardamom plantations. Considering the destruction of homes, shops, farms, vehicles etc. the Govt must provide all necessary relief, fair compensation and ensure livelihood-based rehabilitation in safer places. The top-down model of 'development' being pushed and promoted by most political parties, where the vulnerable always pay the costs, often with their lives, needs to be challenged upfront. □□□

'SATISFYING COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS'?

Why Sub-Classification of SC Reservation

TNM

THE OBSERVATIONS BY several members of the SC's Constitution bench lack empirical evidence and overpower the constitutional arrangements in this case, where any changes in SC/ST reservation should be the prerogative of Parliament, not the judiciary.

Why are the majority of Dalits landless? Why do only 9% of Dalits operate on agricultural land (Agricultural Census, 2015-2016)? Why do only 4% of SC and ST families have a member in government jobs (The Socio-Economic and Caste Census 2011)? Why does the Brahmin community alone monopolise 48% of the national income and other upper-caste communities 45% above the national average income (The Wealth Inequality, Class, and Caste in India report for 1961-2012)? Why has the number of unfilled posts in the Scheduled Castes/Sched-

uled Tribes reserved category in central ministries increased substantially over the years?

Why are more than 50% of posts in the SC/ST category lying vacant (Department of Personnel & Training, 2019); why more than 65% of corporate board members are from a single upper caste group? (Study conducted by D Ajit, Han Donker and Ravi Saxena titled 'Corporate Boards in India: Blocked by Caste?' in 2012 found that "caste diversity is non-existent in the Indian corporate sector and nearly 65% of the Indian corporate board members are from one caste group – the forward caste – indicating that it is a small and closed world"). Why are SC/ST communities over-represented in low-paying jobs and under-represented in high-paying ones in private sector employment (Azim Premji University in 2019)?

Instead of seeking answers to these questions, the Supreme Court has given a verdict based on some hypothetically leading/dominant SC communities which do not exist on any paper or official document.

Moreover, it is important to ask: while striking down the Maratha Reservation, the Supreme Court said that it could find no credible data to suggest that the Maratha community is in any way socially or educationally backward. What evidence then did the Supreme Court have to identify which communities within SCs are leading and which communities have been left behind? Can such a crucial decision regarding historically marginalised communities be taken in the absence of any authentic evidence based on data or studies? The present judgment exhibits a striking resemblance to the popular narrative of the upper caste against the SC/ST reservation. Often these narratives lack evidence and are shaped instead by the contempt and manufactured anxieties of the upper castes toward the communities they oppress and exploit.

In addition, the narrative around the sub-categorisation of SC reservation is also part of the vote bank politics of upper caste-led political parties, which aim to corner the politically conscious SC communities who historically have been challenging the supremacy of the upper castes. As a result, sub-categorisation without a targeted approach or policy of providing basic necessities to the most backward communities among SCs remains mostly bad-faith politics. This is aimed at weakening the 'Scheduled Caste' as a potent political-class category and punishing those SC communities who stand against casteist and communal agendas of ruling upper caste politics. The present judgment of sub-categorisation should be seen against the backdrop of such divisive politics of the upper caste/dominant caste. The court also doesn't question how far sub-categorisation helped those most backward Dalits where such measures were implemented, for instance in Punjab and Bihar.

What is even more surprising in the present judgment is Justice BR Gavai's comment that "the State must come up with a policy to identify the creamy layer among SC communities and take them out of the fold of affirmative action," which echoes the popular contempt of the upper caste against SC/ST/OBC reservations and was welcomed by the other judges. However, no judge asked what the percentage of the creamy layer within SCs is and if economically mobile SCs face caste discrimination in job appointments or university admissions. Existing studies on caste and caste-based discrimination in jobs, education, and even politics states that irrespective of economic position, SCs face discrimination by the upper caste.

If one studies the cases of caste discrimination in promotions and the suicides of SC students in university spaces like IITs, it becomes clear that it is not economic but caste identity that still matters in so-called modern institutions. It would have

been much appreciated if Justice BR Gavai had commented on the demand for land distribution to landless SC communities. But sadly, such demands do not satisfy the 'collective consciousness' of the upper castes.

Lastly, the most important question one would like to ask the seven-judge Constitution bench headed by Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud is in which sphere do they want to ensure the so-called 'true equality' they talked about? As reserved government jobs are reduced to only about 3% due to rapid privatisation and the commercialisation of education becoming the new reality of India, will the Supreme Court ever go against the upper caste collective consciousness and stand in support of reservation in the private sector for poor SC-ST communities? In Justice BR Gavai's words, will the Supreme Court ever ensure 'true equality' in India's private sector, which has been monopolised by the upper caste? □□

FROM YOUNG PALESTINIAN WRITERS

Gaza Writes Back

N&L

IN AN UPDATED VERSION OF the tail wagging the dog, if the US does wind up getting dragged into World War Three by the Israeli government, the book, *Gaza Writes Back: Short Stories from Young Writers in Gaza, Palestine*, edited by Refaat Alareer, will be referred to for those looking for answers as to the how and why.

As to how: old man Biden allowed the youngster Netanyahu to run circles around him. Months ago, President Biden could have said, "No more bombs, no more bullets, no more Armed Personnel Carriers, no more Apache helicopters, no more F-16 jets until you get rid of

Bibi Netanyahu." Even the Israelis don't want him. Instead, all Biden could do was mumble, "We have an ironclad agreement." Maybe if he had done something to stop the slaughter, he wouldn't have garnered so many "uncommitted" votes.

REVISITING DEADLY ORDEAL
Gaza Writes Back is a collection of short stories by young Palestinians in the wake of Operation Cast Lead, perpetrated by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) from Dec. 27, 2008, through Jan. 18, 2009. It was published on the fifth anniversary of that atrocity.

According to Wikipedia approximately 1,400 Palestinians died and

13 Israelis. The harrowing stories of these people, many of whom were graduates of the Islamic University of Gaza, put into perspective the current genocide mounted by the IDF and enabled by the US government, in which nearly 40,000 Palestinians have been slaughtered.

From the introduction: "Operation Cast Lead was deeply traumatic for all of us who were in Gaza at the time. This is the first book of its kind...Gaza Writes Back comes to resist Israel's attempts to murder these emerging voices, to squander the suffering of the martyrs, to bleach the blood, to dam the tears, and to smother the screams. This book shows the world that despite Israel's continuous attempts to kill steadfastness in us, Palestinians keep going on, never surrendering to pain or death, and always seeing and seeking liberty

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and hope in the darkest of hours. Palestine is a martyr away, a tear away, a missile away, or a whimper away. Palestine is a story away.”

The majority of the stories were written by women. Many can be read in the context of contesting the Israeli government’s narrative and myths of ownership of Palestine. Death and dying permeate the stories, written by a generation that spent a considerable part of life looking death in the eye.

TO ‘LEAD A BETTER LIFE’

The desire to explore and describe

the experiences of life—including, in this case, that of death, so that others may lead a better life is the very act of *sumud*, or steadfastness, which has long characterised Palestinian life. Many of the stories are heartbreaking. As a US citizen, it is difficult, maybe even impossible to imagine the level of pain, fear, terror, suffering, loneliness, and abandonment that is being inflicted on the Gazans every day.

From “Scars” by Aya Rabah: “I could not explain why I saw death in my son’s eyes at that moment.

The clouds came and attacked the moon later. No moon was seen in the heavens anymore...The first time Salam truly smiled was when he was dying.”

Netanyahu’s genocide is a gift to the Iranian rulers, but it could also be a catalyst for a new Arab Spring. The Palestinians are being slaughtered today, but what goes around, comes around. Biden is stumbling, Trump is a warmonger—this was how World War One started. □□□

—Little Brother of Fighting Spirit
[Courtesy: News & Letters]

LETTER

State’s Apathy

In a tragic incident in May 2019 two people were killed due to manual scavenging in Bhagya Vihar, Delhi. On 7th May 2019, five informal workers were made to clean the septic tank of a private household where two workers died due to asphyxiation and three workers were left severely injured. One of the workers, Sher Singh, was left critically injured from the incident. Sher Singh was a Dalit migrant worker from Uttar Pradesh and worked as a daily wage labourer. For many hours he lay unconscious inside the septic tank and the exposure to poisonous gasses caused grievous harm to his health. He was later diagnosed with Tuberculosis, Hepatitis B and many other life threatening diseases.

Dalit Adivasi Shakti Adhikar Manch (DASAM) had conducted a fact finding of the case and found that Sher Singh had not received any compensation from the government. DASAM continuously approached the government to avail medical help for Sher Singh but did not get any appropriate help from the government agencies. Through the help and contribution of many like-minded individuals DASAM was able to raise crowd funds to support

the medical expenses of Sher Singh over the years.

While battling with illness, Sher Singh’s wife Soni had to leave her job to take care of his bedridden husband. Her eldest son had to leave education at the age of 15 and took up informal work to sustain his family. Not only this, Soni and her son have been diagnosed with Tuberculosis due to being in direct contact with Sher Singh. Sher Singh and Soni have three school going daughters who are diagnosed with various illnesses due to lack of proper nutrition and sanitation facilities in the household.

On 8 June 2024, after battling for his life for five years Sher Singh passed away.

While grieving the loss of their husband and father, the family has been struck by another tragedy caused due to the same incident. Sher Singh’s eldest son, is in a critical condition and is admitted in Lala Ram Saroop T.B. Hospital, New Delhi as he is not responding to medications. The burden of sustaining his family by doing daily wage work and taking care of his ailing father caused his health to deteriorate. The doctors state that his Tuberculosis has gotten worse and he

has to be admitted in the hospital for the next five to six weeks.

DASAM condemns the state’s inaction towards banning the practice of manual scavenging and not taking measures to rehabilitate the families of victims.

During this time of need, Soni requires immediate monetary aid for medical expenses and to sustain her children. DASAM appeals to you all to contribute to help Soni for the medical expenses of her son’s treatment. You can directly make your contribution to Soni. The following are her bank details:

Name: Soni Singh
Account No: 42568100015189
IFSC Code: BARB0MIANWA (Fifth character is zero)
Branch Name: Mianwali Nagar, Delhi
Bank Name: Bank of Baroda
Soni Singh: +91 8882345097

**Sanjeev Kumar
Adhikar Manch (DASAM)
Dalit Adivasi Shakti**

[Please share the details of your contribution to dashaktimanach@gmail.com
For more information please contact
Sanjeev Kumar (9958797409), Ashok Kumar Taank (7065721374), Vasundhara Jhobta (8626959948)]

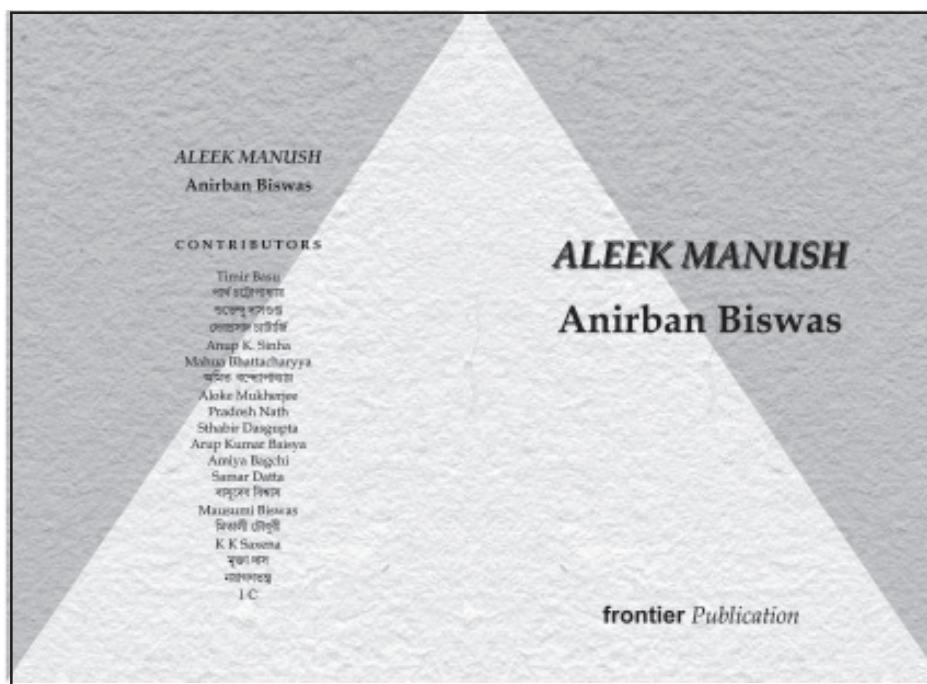
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